Museography

The Official Magazine of the Kalamazoo Valley Museum

Jump to Japan

AT THE KVM'S NEW SPECIAL EXHIBITION
Museography is published three times a year: Fall, Winter, and Spring.

Questions about Kalamazoo Valley Museum programs described in this publication may be directed to the Kalamazoo Valley Museum offices.

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Cover art: Paul Sizer

Look for this icon throughout the magazine. It indicates objects you can view in the special Museography display case, located next to the reception desk on the main floor of the Museum, or in other exhibit areas throughout the KVM.
Museography

FROM THE DIRECTOR

A BICENTENNIAL, A MOON LANDING, AND A TOTAL ECLIPSE

My favorite definition of history is Carl Becker’s, “the memory of things said and done.” I like his emphasis on remembering because memory puts what happened in the past at the service of present needs.

That is why we mark anniversary dates with commemorations, with public celebrations of things said and done. The Museum will offer two special celebrations this summer worth your attention.

First, on Aug. 22, the Kalamazoo Valley Museum, the Kalamazoo Convention and Visitors Bureau, and the Arts Council of Greater Kalamazoo, Inc. will mark the Lincoln Bicentennial Year (200th anniversary of Lincoln’s birth) with a band concert and a re-enactment of the Lincoln-Douglas debates here and at the Rotary Stage in Bronson Park.

This will be the fourth Lincoln commemoration in Kalamazoo history. Three years ago in August 2006, the Museum remembered that a 47-year-old politician from Illinois had come to Kalamazoo on the train to speak in behalf of the new Republican Party’s first presidential candidate, explorer John C. Fremont. The year was 1856. Abraham Lincoln, who had been nominated for vice president at the party’s first convention in Philadelphia earlier in the summer, was one of several speakers that day at a mass rally for “free speech, free press, free soil, free men, and Fremont.”

The newspaper recorded an estimated 10,000 fervent Republicans had come to Kalamazoo for the rally but it got Lincoln’s name wrong, referring to him only as T. Lincoln.

Second, from Saturday, July 18, through Wednesday, July 22, the Museum will mark the 40th anniversary of Apollo 11’s moon landing.

Many of us witnessed the black-and-white images on television late one summer evening as a space-suited astronaut from Ohio landed.

On Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, July 20-22, special episodes of the PBS television series “Reading Rainbow” are scheduled in the Mary Jane Stryker Theater.

The same week in which we will celebrate the moon landing, visitors will have an opportunity to be eyewitnesses in real time to the longest total solar eclipse in the 21st century.

San Francisco’s science center, The Exploratorium, will be sending a team of observers to produce a broadcast and webcast from China. Exploratorium coverage begins at 8:30 p.m. in the Stryker Theater, with totality achieved around 9:40 p.m.

As the eclipse draws to an end in China, Museum planetarium coordinator Eric Schreur will send live images to the Museum from a cruise ship in the Pacific Ocean where the eclipse becomes total after it ends in China. The eclipse broadcast and webcast events will also be repeated in the evening.

The Museum will mark the 40th anniversary of Apollo 11’s moon landing.

On Saturday and Sunday afternoons—July 18 and 19—plan- etarium shows and Challenger Learning Center mini-missions will return visitors to the moon.

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AN ALL-AMERICAN 50-YEAR-OLD

Like so many grand traditions, the 72-year-old All-American Soap Box Derby had very humble beginnings.

It was a Depression-era pastime for boys that became a nearly overnight sensation, first in Ohio and then sweeping the country.

A savvy newspaper photographer, Myron E. Scott, saw three boys racing homemade cars without engines down a hill on a neighborhood street near Dayton, Ohio, in 1933. It was his idea to turn this pastime into a competition with a prize.

A few weeks later on an August afternoon, 362 kids gathered to race their cars made out of anything they could scrounge. The race attracted a crowd of nearly 40,000, according to the Dayton Daily News that sponsored the event.

Within a few years, soap-box-derby events sprang up around the country, drawing huge numbers of spectators and garnering sponsorships and significant prizes.

Rules and regulations were established and refined, celebrities joined the fun and fanfare, and races from around the world began to show up in U.S. competitions.

Except for a short hiatus during World War II, the popularity of the derby continued to grow, reaching its peak participation in 1971.

That was also the first year girls were admitted to the competition.

In July 1999, with the sponsorship of the Kalamazoo Optimist Club, WKZO, and DeNooyer Chevrolet, 120 boys gathered on West Michigan Avenue on the Western Michigan University campus to compete in the Kalamazoo Soap Box Derby.

Ed Cherkoian recently recalled his victory at the 1959 competition and his subsequent run in the derby world championship at Akron, Ohio, later that summer.

“It took me one summer (to build the racer),” he said. “I did it all myself. The back-wheel brakes are made from our TV antenna. I went up on our roof to get them. Oh, my dad was mad! He whooped me good for that.”

About the race in Akron, Cherkoian said: “The race... was huge—160,000 people. In Akron, everyone knew the third lane was rough, and I was in the third lane! So, as soon as the race started, I cut in front of Detroit in the second lane. Boy was he mad. He tried to pick a fight with me after the race.”

Young Ed Cherkoian did not win the big race, but his local fame lives on at the Kalamazoo Valley Museum where his race car is on permanent exhibition on the third floor.

Today, the derby is going strong. Instead of scrappy cars, kids can buy regulation car kits that sell for sums beginning at around $450.

The goals of the program, however, remain the same: “…to teach youngsters some of the basic skills of workmanship, the spirit of competition and the perseverance to continue a project once it has begun.” Check it out at www.aasbd.com. 

Above: Edward Cherkoian’s winning racer donated by WKZO. Following Cherkoian’s win in Kalamazoo, his sponsors customized the racer for his entry in the World Championship in Akron, Ohio. At top: a triumphant Cherkoian poses with his trophy. As a champion entrant in the 22nd All-American Soap Box Derby, he was given the title of honorary citizen of Akron in August 1959.

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Two happenings in May will turn Kalamazoo into “The Animation Capital of the Midwest.”

“Jump to Japan: Discovering Culture through Popular Art”—with one of those forms of creativity being animation—will begin a four-month stay at the Kalamazoo Valley Museum on May 9.

The interactive, hands-on exhibit will be well in place by the time the fifth Kalamazoo Animation Festival International (KAFI) sweeps into downtown on May 14 for a four-day salute to this evolving art form. Nuts-and-bolts information about the KAFI events, screenings, and activities is available at www.gokaifi.com or by calling the KAFI office at (269) 373-7883.

Jointly developed by the Minnesota Children’s Museum and The Children’s Museum in Seattle, “Jump to Japan” showcases that nation’s amazing culture through activities based on animation, manga (comics), woodblock prints and traditional scrolls.

The public is invited to a sneak preview on May 8 from 6 to 9 p.m. for the third annual “Night at the Museum” gathering. Part of the attraction will be creating animation and comics.

The exhibit, which will be in Kalamazoo through Sept. 7, is the result of a collaboration with the Ghibli Museum in Mitaka and the movie studio that produced the animated film, “My Neighbor Totoro.” The animator, Hayao Miyazaki, won the 2003 Academy Award for Best Animated Feature Film.

Japanese animation and manga have become very popular among American youth as illustrated by the broad acceptance of the phenomenon known as Pokemon.

But the three-part exhibit is designed to entertain people of all ages. In addition to creating their own manga drawings and animation at a pair of art stations, visitors can take off their shoes and step into a traditional tatami room for a tea party, try on a kimono and other traditional Japanese clothing, and play the ancient card game known as kura.

They’ll learn the fundamentals of woodblock printing and how the Japanese tell stories through scrolls. They’ll shop at a Japanese store and learn to use that nation’s coin of the realm.

The four art forms are linked in a variety of ways. In “Jump to Japan,” the dominant link between animation, manga and woodblock prints is that they all are—or were—popular art forms. And from them, visitors can experience the complexity of Japanese culture (traditional and contemporary, rural and urban, and realistic and fantasy).

Through scenes and characters from “My Neighbor Totoro,” visitors will explore how animated films are brainstormed, designed and created, and try their hand at the magic of making one-dimensional images come to life.

The Ghibli Museum in Mitaka City, Japan.

An ancient picture scroll is complemented by a panel containing “seek-and-find” questions that call attention to details in the scroll. Visitors see similarities between ancient scrolls, woodblock prints and the contemporary art forms of manga and animation.

Above: Visitors can create their own manga (comics); top right: ride the Cat Bus from the film My Neighbor Totoro; above right: play with animation rings—give a spin and see Hamtaro or Pokemon.

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In the 1870s and early 1880s, Kalamazoo prided itself on its self-proclaimed status as the largest village in America. Although its population was large enough to qualify as an incorporated city under Michigan law, the residents had been reluctant to do so. That changed in 1884, and this year Kalamazoo marks its 125th anniversary as a city.

By 1880, the village had a population of more than 16,000. In the years since the Civil War, numerous industries had developed. The Kalamazoo Paper Co. started the village on the path to becoming “The Paper City.” The Kalamazoo Wagon Co. and the Michigan Buggy Co. were but two of several local carriage-and-wagon manufacturers.

William Lawrence and Daniel Chapin built an iron foundry on Rose Street to make steam engines and agricultural equipment. The attractive Second Empire-style building (across the street from the Museum) still stands as testimony to Gilded Age aesthetics.

The B. S. Williams Co., Bigelow & Phelps and others produced enough windmills to lead some to dub Kalamazoo “The Windmill City.” And many more examples abound.

Culturally, the village was growing as well. A spectacular performing-arts center, the Academy of Music, opened in 1882 on South Rose Street opposite where a new county courthouse would soon be built.

In 1879, the Ladies Library Association moved into a new home that still graces Park Street. Within a few more years, a new public library would stand at the corner of Rose and South streets, the gift of Dr. and Mrs. Edwin Van Deusen.

Public services were also expanding. By 1881, there were more than 100 subscribers to the local telephone company. A new sewer system was installed that same year. The following year, home delivery of mail was introduced with the carrier making his rounds four times a day in the downtown area.

And in September 1882, two horse-drawn streetcars operated on a trial basis on Lovell Street, forerunners of a full public transit system that began operating two years later.

The village trustees had established a paid fire company of six men in 1877 under Captain J. Healy. It was housed on the first floor of Corporation Hall on Burdick Street. On April 13, 1882, Stephen H. Wattles became the chief of a newly established police force.

Given these developments, it should come as no surprise that many business and civic leaders began to call for a change in government. Kalamazoo should take its proper place among the burgeoning cities of America.

For several years, supporters and opponents of city status debated the pros and cons of seeking that status from the Michigan Legislature. Opponents feared that city government would lead to higher taxes and cronyism.

By 1883, however, a charter commission was drawing up the blueprint for a new city government and, on June 8, voters approved the document. Kalamazoo would have a mayor and 10 aldermen, two from each of five wards in the city.

Edwin DeYoe was the last village president in 1883, but also the city’s second mayor, elected in 1885.

City Hall and the first fire station were located in Corporation Hall on Burdick Street, shown here in 1908.

The wards were mapped out on the basis of population and geography. The first ward was the northeast section of the city and the second ward was the northwest. The southern half of Kalamazoo was divided from west to east into the third, fourth, and fifth wards. The city’s southern boundary was then at Inkster Street.

On April 7, 1883, with state approval, Kalamazoo held its first election for municipal office. Turnout was heavy with 84 percent of Kalamazoo’s 3,156 registered male voters going to the polls.

They chose Republican Allen H. Potter over the Democratic candidate and outgoing village president, Edwin DeVoe, by a margin of 53 to 47 percent.

Seven Republican aldermen were elected to the Democrats’ three. The voters selected Democrats, however, for the positions of treasurer and recorder.

The original structure for city government lasted until April 1918. Then, voters approved a new charter that ended the ward system and created the current commission-city manager form of government. All commissioners would be elected at large. The first mayor under the new charter was Dr. William E. Upjohn.

The 1918 City Charter was controversial and it was several years until legal and political challenges to the changes were resolved. Despite these problems, Kalamazoo continued to grow and prosper. The once “biggest village in America” has been a city for 125 years.
On May 8, 1885, the citizens of Kalamazoo learned that the man they had chosen as their first mayor just one year earlier had died. For 40 years, Allen Potter had been a prominent fixture in both the civic and business life of Kalamazoo.

Potter was born in Saratoga County, N. Y., on Oct. 2, 1818. At the age of 13, he was apprenticed to a tinsmith where he learned the trade, a trade he would practice when, at 20, he moved with his parents to Michigan.

After several years in Tecumseh and Adrian, the future mayor moved to Kalamazoo in 1845 when he bought Milford Joy's hardware store, reputedly the first such store in southwest Michigan.

That fall, Potter entered into a long-lasting business partnership with Jeremiah P. Woodbury. They purchased and rebuilt an iron mill along the Kalamazoo River near where Mount Olivet Road and Riverview Drive intersect, using the abundant bog iron in the river banks to make stoves and pig iron.

The partners sold the business in 1854, having built it into the largest bog-iron foundry in Michigan.

Potter returned to the hardware business, but he and Woodbury remained partners in many of the village's most prominent business ventures for the next three decades.

In 1856, Potter, Woodbury, and William A. Wood organized a private bank that eventually became the Michigan National Bank (not affiliated with the more recent bank of the same name). Woodbury was president and Potter served as vice president.

Subsequent mergers and acquisitions have seen the enterprise evolve into National City Bank and now PNC Bank.

The two men were also among the original investors in the Kalamazoo Gas Light Co. Established in 1857, it produced gas from coal to light the homes and streets of Kalamazoo. When Kalamazoo's first paper mill was founded in 1867, the two partners were among those who put their money into the Kalamazoo Paper Co. Potter was an original investor in, and president of, the Kalamazoo and South Haven Railroad.

Potter was also active in the public affairs of his community. He was elected to several government offices including village trustee (1855), township supervisor (1856), and village president (1859, 1863, 1870, and 1872), He served one term as a trustee on the board of education and two terms as its president. He was elected to the Michigan House of Representatives in 1867-68 and to Congress in 1877-78.

When the village faced several major issues, Potter served on commissions that organized the first hook-and-ladder fire company, supervised the construction of Corporation Hall (which housed the village government offices) in 1867 and a new county jail in 1868-69, and recommended the village's first water works in 1869. He was a commissioner on the board of the water works from 1872-1875.

In civic affairs, he was one of the founders and a long-time board member of the Michigan Female Seminary, an organizer of the Unitarian Church, and served as treasurer of the Kalamazoo Ladies Soldiers Aid Society during the Civil War. From 1880 to 1885, he was the treasurer of the Michigan Asylum for the Insane.

Given his record of public service, it is not surprising that fellow citizens elected him the first mayor on April 7, 1884, after Kalamazoo became a city. His death at the age of 66 the following year prevented him from serving his full term.

While few today recall the first mayor, there remain physical traces of his life. Potter Street runs for three blocks from Lovell to Dutton between Park Street and Westnedge Avenue.

Two of his homes still stand. One, an octagon house on South Westnedge, was built in 1853 on what was then a 2.5-acre property. He and his wife, Charity, whom he married in 1845, lived there until they moved to a new home in the fashionable South Street neighborhood in 1870. That home, too, still stands.

Charity Potter outlived her husband by more than 30 years. She remained active in the community serving on the boards of the Children's Home Association, the Ladies Library Association, and the Unitarian Church (now the People's Church). She died in 1921 at the age of 93.

This year, marking the 125th anniversary of Kalamazoo's incorporation as a city, is an appropriate time to recall the contributions of Allen Potter, the first mayor of Kalamazoo.
The Fire of the Century

It was labeled a million-dollar fire—quite a chunk of change for 1909, equating to between $20 and $25 million today.

When the Burdick House went up in flames on an arctic-like, bone-chilling evening a century ago, it earned a distinction that remains to this day—one of Kalamazoo’s greatest disasters.

Worse than the floods that have inundated the community several times? Worse than the tornado that smashed into the downtown in May of 1980, sucking century-old trees like green onions out of the ground, as The Kalamazoo Gazette reported? That’s a debate for another time, but safe to say the fire of Dec. 9, 1909, is in “the team photo.”

Originally known as the Cosmopolitan Hotel, what burned that night first opened its 80 to 100 rooms in the spring of 1853. The contractor was Frank Dennison, who attached bathing salons to the four-floor, brick building with dimensions of 100-by-70 feet.

Work was actually begun in August of 1850 by Alexander J. Sheldon, a shaker-and-do’er who is given credit for literally lifting the village out of the mud by installing the first planked walkways.

In June of 1855, the hostelry, built for $12,000, became the Burdick House—named for Gen. Justus Burdick, an influential early settler.

Known for its “elegant arches,” one was described as “magnificent… (sitting) like a majestic queen with her children ranged on either side.” Broad “winding, spirally” stairs took guests to the upper floors. A 45-foot “elegantly finished” tower on the roof reached for the sky, while the window sills were white marble from Vermont. An arcade of shops on the lower level was called “the largest and best constructed hotel in western Michigan.”

Flames took their first crack at the Burdick House in October of 1855 when wooden buildings in an adjacent block caught fire. While fast work by fire fighters saved the day, the hotel did sustain damage to furnishings because water was thrown into rooms to prevent any kind of ignition.

As the village’s social hotspot and one of the finer inns in the region, the Burdick added stables to serve the transportation medium of most guests. The barn that could house up to 200 horses cost $3,000. Flames consumed it in 1876, but the main structure was again spared.

But so in December of 1909 when the then half-century-old building was reduced to rubble, looking like the results of a World War II bombing.

A night watchman for the cluster of stores smelled smoke around 10 p.m. and alerted the fire department. The flames of unknown origin started in the basement of the Star Bargain Store, reportedly the third fire there in four years.

With the temperature near zero, more than 160 guests were ushered into the street, many in their sleeping attire. While some sought shelter in other hotels, many gathered in the snow-covered street with their suitcases.

Intense smoke spewed from the store, preventing Kalamazoo firemen from reaching the source of the flames because they couldn’t see past the clouds. That’s why they couldn’t prevent the spread to the hotel itself, which eventually burst into flames.

The alarm spread far enough for Battle Creek to send a rig and hose wagon. Two “steamers” came from Grand Rapids, making what was up to that time the “fastest run” between the two towns.

Initially only smoke filled the hotel proper, but that didn’t prevent staff from rounding up the guests and getting them outside. The telephone operator, identified as Nina Harrigan, stayed at the switchboard until she had called every room. Only then did she stagger out of the smoke-filled lobby.

There still was a bit of panic, which required male rescuers to carry women to the elevator. One female guest insisted on returning to her room for a treasured clock; another refused to leave until her trunk was packed.

An English actress performing at the Fuller Theater arrived to find the Burdick shooting out flames and feared for her pet monkey’s life. A porter, L. F. Hollingshead, went up the stairs and saved “Booley.” A 19-year-old bell boy, Russell Faux, carried a girl who had been overcome by smoke to safety.

Firemen, three of whom were knocked out of service by the smoke, fought the blaze for 15 hours. With frozen fingers and feet, they worked with tools and ladders covered by ice. Additional water had to be brought from the tower at the Kalamazoo Asylum to the west of town.

Two years later, the smoking ruins were only memories. In their place was “The New Burdick,” which was billed for its “Fireproof Construction.” Bigger and better than ever, it became known for its ornate features and decorations—a city landmark. The first name on the register in 1911 was that of President William Howard Taft who came to Kalamazoo to dedicate the new YMCA building on Main Street to the west.

There must have been some kind of kindling-temperature karma in that downtown block because in 1943, 75 guests were routed from the hotel when a short-circuit sprouted flames. Eleven years later, it happened again.

The New Burdick” disappeared into history when it was flattened by wrecking balls in 1973 to make way for the Kalamazoo Center, today the Radisson Plaza Hotel and Suites.

In 1911, the hotel was rebuilt to modern standards of the time. It met the wrecking ball in 1972 to make way for the Kalamazoo Center, today the Radisson Plaza Hotel and Suites.
In 1834, when Kalamazoo was first platted, Burdick Street was one of three main roads cutting north to south through the village—and it was only four blocks long.

Those four blocks evolved from a village street, to a bustling shopping district, and now to a unique retail corridor.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the building of the downtown pedestrian mall on Burdick Street, which has the distinction of being the first such mall in the United States.

Take a historical walk down Burdick Street for a glimpse at how it has changed over the last 150 years.

Clockwise from below: Whether transportation was by horse and buggy in 1875, automobile in 1935, or on foot in 1967, Burdick Street, as viewed looking north from South Street in these three top photos, has been a community destination. (Notice the streetcar lines and brick paving in the 1935 photograph, courtesy of the Kalamazoo Public Library.)

The traffic-laden section of North Burdick Street, shown above in 1929, is today a quiet pedestrian area (left) next to the Radisson Plaza Hotel and Suites, Kalamazoo Valley Community College, and the Kalamazoo Valley Museum.

Burdick Street was a typical downtown shopping area in the 1950s (below). After its conversion to a pedestrian mall in 1959, the sales ladies of W.T. Grant posed over the new reflecting pool outside their store (left).
The Making of the Kalamazoo Mall

(Editor’s note: Hayden Bradford was The Kalamazoo Gazette’s reporter covering City Hall in the late 1950s when the revolutionary idea of a downtown pedestrian mall was proposed. When completed, it garnered coverage in more than 1,500 newspapers around the world. Now living in Highland Park, Ill., the 42-year Gazette veteran offered these recollections of how it all came about a half century ago.)

By the mid-point of the 20th century, steadily increasing automobile traffic had begun to strangulate this nation’s downtown business districts.

Victor Gruen, an Austrian-born commercial architect, developed Northland, one of the nation’s first suburban shopping malls, near Detroit. Gruen also drew up a visionary plan to remake Fort Worth’s downtown.

Clarence Elliott, a veteran professional at the top of his field.

Ham’s enthusiasm for Gruen’s work convinced a small group of downtown merchants to form the Downtown Kalamazoo Association (DKA) and bring Gruen here.

After just one conversation, the DKA started to raise funds for a plan to revolutionize central Kalamazoo. By early 1958, Gruen’s staffs produced a striking booklet that unveiled a grandiose plan.

Elton (Buzz) Ham, a Kalamazoo College political science professor, also headed the city of Kalamazoo’s Municipal Research Department. Ham’s enthusiasm for Gruen’s work convinced a small group of downtown merchants to form the Downtown Kalamazoo Association (DKA) and bring Gruen here.

After just one conversation, the DKA started to raise funds for a plan to revolutionize central Kalamazoo. By early 1958, Gruen’s staffs produced a striking booklet that unveiled a grandiose plan.

Gruen would preach his concept in other cities across the nation, but it was Kalamazoo that made it the most of it.

What made that possible was a smooth-working team made up of inspired but pragmatic leadership both in the DKA and city government. Ham was the crucial link and driving force, keeping his hand in the project from beginning to end.

During the next year, the Kalamazoo Planning Commission met on scores of Thursday nights while the DKA leadership met over breakfast most Mondays.

Planning Commission Vice Chairman Winship Todd played devil’s advocate. Week after week Todd tore holes in the plan, but his criticism led to change after change that would prove fruitful.

Another key to the project’s success was the political leadership of Mayor Glenn S. Allen Jr. In the Kalamazoo City Commission’s first three decades, entrepreneurs from such companies as Sutherland Paper and Upjohn could turn over operation of their privately owned industries to subsidiaries while they devoted time to municipal service. But that time had passed on.

Allen must have worked incredibly long hours to have managed duties in his law partnership while devoting what others might consider full time dealing with city problems. Allen’s exceptional political skills enabled him to win mall support first from his fellow commissioners and then from the citizenry.

Success lay in the details. The city’s utility and parks departments provided the special leadership and skills needed to plan and build the mall. Al Sabo, city utilities director and president of the national Municipal Utilities Association, and Nick Kik, director of the city’s parks system, oversaw exceptionally efficient staffs that enabled the pioneer project to be built almost impeccably and on schedule.

City Attorney David Morris was the “can-do” lawyer who looked for ways to make new ideas work rather than for excuses not to. He found a clear path through the legal maze, and no serious challenge ever threatened the project. Morris also ruled that the plan did not need to be approved in a special election.

One turning point came when Mayor Allen took a group of merchants and city officials to Grand Haven to check out an experiment using saw horses to block off its main street. The mayor noticed that, despite no vehicle traffic, shoppers would walk to the corners before crossing the street rather than crossing in the middle of blocks. He convinced the others that a Burdick Street saw-horse test would not be worth the effort.

When the planning advisers sent the drastically revised Gruen plan to the City Commission, Todd had diffused the public hearing’s few objections and opened the way for the commission’s unanimous approval.

A week before, Kalamazoo businessman Edwin Walters made his pitch against the mall before the commission. But he became a mall fan once it was built. His role piqued his interest in city government to the point that he was later elected to the commission and served as vice mayor.

At the beginning of the mall’s construction, however, torn-up Burdick Street took on the look of a war zone, and for a time public acceptance almost evaporated. All that changed almost instantaneously months later when sod was installed amidst colorful plantings. The final touch came when merchant-philanthropist Irving Gilmore decided many of the merchants’ awnings had become tawdry, and donated the funds needed to buy a new awning for every storefront.

The city decided it could not afford the ring road or huge parking facilities, and Gruen never approved of Kalamazoo’s failure to implement his total plan. Despite Gruen’s criticism, the nation’s first permanent downtown pedestrian mall became the catalyst that revitalized downtown Kalamazoo for almost a half century.
Mayors Riverfront Park

Some warm evening this summer, fans will roar their approval when a Kalamazoo Kings player loft a long fly ball over the wall at Homer Stryker Field for a game-winning home run. But neither the fans nor the player will give a thought to the history of the land on which the baseball diamond sits.

An 1834 plat map of the village of Bronson, as Kalamazoo was then known, describes the land that Mayors Riverfront Park now occupies as “heavily-timbered bottomlands.”

In the 1928 county atlas, a portion of the land is designated “River View Park.” The city of Kalamazoo acquired the acreage from Lay and Lane in the 1920s and started developing a park. After 1931, when U.S. 12 (now King Highway) was completed to downtown, the city sold off the land west and south, retaining only the portions now known as Mayors Riverfront Park and Red Arrow Golf Course.

During the 1930s, as part of the New Deal’s WPA (Works Projects Administration) program, the city built a football field in the park. The Catholic Athletic League leased the field to St. Augustine High School and later Hackett High School. It was named Soisson-School and later Hackett High School.

During the 1930s, the Catholic Athletic Association leased the field belonging to Sheldon’s nephew, Theodore P. Sheldon, a prominent banker and real-estate investor. Later, Frank T. Lay and M. Henry Lane, owners of the Michigan Buggy Co, held title to portions of the property.

While all these owners were prominent businessmen, the land was not always seen as desirable. For a time, the area was a dump known as “the jungle” and a hangout for those down on their luck.

In the 1928 map, River View Park along Mills Street. King Highway had not yet been built.

The first recorded owner was Thomas C. Sheldon, who, in 1836, sold a portion of the land to Anthony Cooley and Erastus Bailey. Cooley and Bailey dug a millrace across the neck of a large horseshoe-shaped bend in the Kalamazoo River to power a grain mill and saw mill.

Decades later, the 1873 Kalamazoo County Atlas shows the land belonging to Sheldon’s nephew, Theodore P. Sheldon, a prominent banker and real-estate investor. Later, Frank T. Lay and M. Henry Lane, owners of the Michigan Buggy Co, held title to portions of the property.

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The entrance to the current Mayors Riverfront Park welcomes fans to summer baseball games. (Photo courtesy of City of Kalamazoo Records Center)

The Cobb Twins

Old family photos can be a real treasure unless they’re unidentified. Otherwise they’re just faces in the crowd of old photos that can be found in any attic, antique store, museum, or even for sale on the Internet. One has to wonder why grandpa or great-grandma just didn’t pencil a name on the back.

The Museum has about 14,500 photographs in its collection and more than 1,000 are unidentified family photos. But it’s not completely a lost cause. Occasionally, individuals come in to look at old family photos and have been able to identify some of the faces. Still, that’s rare.

Sometimes, though, we do rescue a photograph from anonymity. That happened last fall while perusing eBay when we found a Civil War-era photograph of unidentified twin girls taken by a Kalamazoo photographer.

In this case, some wise family member long ago penciled along the bottom, “Gertrude” and “Maude.” We recognized the girls immediately. They were the Cobb twins.

The seller had no further information about the photo, but we were able to identify the girls because we have three other photos of them in the collection, along with identical red “sacks” (short, loose-fitting jackets) that they wore as toddlers. We made a bid—and won!

The twins wore these handmade sacks around 1860. Their sister Alice donated the sacks, photographs, and other family keepsakes to the Museum in 1943.

The entrance to the current Mayors Riverfront Park welcomes fans to summer baseball games. (Photo courtesy of City of Kalamazoo Records Center)

Above: C.C. Packard took this photograph of the Cobb twins some time between 1867–1870 when they were about 10 years old. No other pictures are known to exist that show the twins at a later age. Below: This photograph of the twins at about age five has been in the Museum’s collection since 1943.

So now we wondered, “What happened to the twins?”

We searched for information in county death records, obituaries, census records, and city directories. In time, we pieced together a short story of their lives.

Gertrude and Maude Cobb were born in Kalamazoo in 1858 to James B. and Hellen McCall Cobb, who came from New York in 1854. James and Hellen set up a 151-acre farm north of Kalamazoo, between Burdick and Duke streets.

In 1873 they moved into town where they resided at 530 S. Burdick. James was a wool distributor, a member of the Michigan Legislature from 1863-68, commissioner of Kalamazoo County highways from 1861-66, and county treasurer in 1874-75.

The family included a sister, Anna, and a younger set of twins, Carlos and Alice. Of the elder twins, Maude never married and died at age 31 of pneumonia. Her obituary states she was “quite a favorite with the young people.” Twin Gertrude fared far better. She attended the University of Chicago and wrote for Kalamazoo newspapers and magazines. She died in Kalamazoo in 1924 at the age of 66.

It’s not surprising that the Cobb’s photograph ended up in virtual obscurity on an Internet auction. None of the five siblings had children, and without descendants, the twins were largely forgotten.

But their photo was rescued from the realm of long-lost family photographs and into the hands of preserved history. All it took was the eagle-eyes of Museum staff and, of course, the helpful addition of the girls’ names on the bottom of the photograph.
The manufacture, sale and transportation of alcoholic beverages was outlawed in the United States with the passing of the 18th Amendment in 1920. Prohibition was now the law of the land, but it was nothing new in Kalamazoo. As early as March 1836, a Kalamazoo Total Abstinence Temperance Society had been organized. The society had much work to do, however. Eight licensed liquor retailers together sold 9,000 gallons of alcoholic beverages in 1838 to a village with a population of about 1,000 people.

The "drys," as temperance advocates were known, finally carried the day in 1915 when Kalamazoo County voted to ban the sale and consumption of alcohol. Michigan permitted such "local option" status and, after several failed election attempts, Kalamazoo "drys" emerged victorious.

Kalamazoo bars, including the notorious "Saloon Row" along East Main Street (now Michigan Avenue), were shuttered. The ban on alcohol also closed "Dutch Arnold" Van Loghnen's saloon on Burdick Street where a trained monkey collected payment for each patron’s drinks.

Although Kalamazoo police had a five-year head start when Prohibition became the law of the land in 1920, they were no more successful in eliminating alcohol consumption than were authorities anywhere else. Newspaper accounts report police raids and criminal trials resulting from efforts to suppress the traffic in bootleg liquor.

Occasionally these efforts attracted national attention as in 1922 when John D. Dodge, an heir to the Dodge Brothers auto-motive fortune, was arrested for drunken driving in Kalamazoo. Dodge was found guilty of violating Prohibition laws and fined $1,000.

Some idea of the police efforts to enforce Prohibition, and the extent to which many residents tried to evade the law, is recorded in a journal at the Western Michigan University Archives.

Orrville Sternburgh was hired in 1920 as a special officer with the Kalamazoo Police Department. In his diary, he recorded his daily activities with the vice squad from June 1922 through August 1929.

On almost every page, Sternburgh describes arrests for drunkenness, suspicion of drunkenness, and possession or sale of alcohol.

Some individuals flaunted the law. On Dec. 31, 1922, two couples dining at the downtown Oriental Cafe were arrested with a bottle of wine on the table. Officer Sternburgh and his partner found they also had moonshine concealed in their coat pockets.

Others tried to flee from the police, dump their liquor, or throw their bottles away, trying to destroy the evidence.

Sternburgh also described raids on illegal distilleries. In one three-month stretch in early 1924, the police raided 13 distilleries. Some were small-scale operations with five- and 10-gallon stills but one on Fourth Street had a 20-gallon boiler and 250 gallons of "yea mash."

These stills were not restricted to Kalamazoo. During a 1928 raid with the Michigan State Police, Sternburgh reported they seized a 50-gallon still, coils, burners, other equipment, and many 52-gallon barrels of liquor at a farm in Texas Township. The police also worked to close the speakeasies where alcohol was served. On a single night in August of 1928, they raided six speakeasies in Kalamazoo. Another night, they found alcohol being served at the Keystone Club, located above the Rose Club Co. at 230 N. Rose St. (Coincidentally, today that is the location of the Kalamazoo Valley Museum.)

Yet another such police operation in 1923 was directed at a cigar store, bowling alley, and pool room located on the southwest corner of Vine and Mills streets. Many Kalamazoo residents know that site today as the home of The Corner Bar.

While they attempted to enforce Prohibition, the police also made arrests for other illegal substances. On at least two occasions, Sternburgh took people into custody for the sale and possession of cocaine.

Some individuals resisted the law. On Dec. 31, 1922, two couples dining at the downtown Oriental Cafe were arrested with a bottle of wine on the table. Officer Sternburgh and his partner found they also had moonshine concealed in their coat pockets. Others tried to flee from the police, dump their liquor, or throw their bottles away, trying to destroy the evidence.

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What is it?

Look carefully at these items—their designs hold clues to their functions. Can you guess what they were used for?

(Answers below)

#1 This weighs something we enjoy in the morning.

This weighs something we enjoy in the morning.

#2 This helps create something that is long, full or tight.

This keeps something you wear in shape.

#3 This keeps something you wear in shape.

This keeps something you wear in shape.

Jump to Japan

Discovering Culture through Popular Art

May 9 – Sept. 7

Discover Japanese culture through its popular arts, as well as environments and activities that present a broad depiction of Japan—traditional and contemporary, urban and rural, past and present, fantastic and realistic. This exhibit gives students from ages 9–12 a sense of the complexity of Japanese culture and its contemporary urban hustle and bustle. (See articles on pp. 4 and 5 of this issue.)


FEATURED PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

Drop in anytime during the hours indicated for these FREE family programs.

CAMP 9-11

Choice of July 14 or 28

8 a.m.–5 p.m.

Ages 9–11

This interactive camp is designed to educate children on vital health and safety issues. Tour an ambulance and fire truck. Learn first aid, bike, home and water safety, and fire prevention. Included are: camp t-shirt, lunch, snacks, and free things to take home. Co-sponsored by Life EMS and the Kalamazoo Valley Museum. Please contact Life EMS at (269)373-3156 to register.

NASA PARTY

July 18–22

Celebrate both the anniversary of the creation of NASA as well as the first moon landing. (A full listing of events can be found on the inside back cover.)

HANDS-ON HAPPENINGS: SUMMER WORLD TOUR

WEDNESDAYS 1–4 p.m. • FREE

Discover traditional and contemporary art and culture as we explore a different continent each week, making musical instruments, jewelry, hats, toys, and souvenirs. As we explore a different continent each week, we will explore the world’s cultures through hands-on activities including crafts, music and dance performances, and traditional foods. Each week will feature a different continent, with activities designed to educate children about the unique cultures and traditions of each region.

July 22: South America

July 29: North America

Aug. 5: Australia

How this year!

Watch a free episode of Reading Rainbow (program times and descriptions can be found inside back cover), or participate in a Challenger Learning Center mini-mission, or watch a planetarium show (program descriptions and fees below):

CLC mini-mission: Return to the Moon™

1:30 p.m. • $3

The year is 2015. For the first time since 1972, a crew of astronauts is returning to the Moon to establish a permanent base to observe and explore, as well as test the feasibility of off-Earth settlements. Navigating their way into lunar orbit, the crew must construct and launch a probe, and analyze a variety of data gathered from the lunar surface to select a site for establishing the permanent Moon base.

Reservations are required for CLC or space is limited to 15 people. For ages 8 and up. Children under the age of 12 must be accompanied by an adult. Call (269)373-7990 for more details.

Planetarium Show • 2 p.m. • $3

Travel through the Milky Way with The Little Star That Could as it searches for a family of planets. Learn about how star colors reveal their temperature, and how stars come in a variety of sizes and groupings. Grades K–2: 40 minute.

MARY JANE STRYKER THEATER

Enjoy live music, classic films, or independent cinema in the Museum’s own intimate performance space. Free documentary films are screened on Sunday afternoons. For more information, see the inside back cover of this issue or visit us on the web at www.kalamazoomuseum.org.
**PLANE**TARIUM**

Spectacular sights & sounds guide you through our amazing universe—$1/person

*Where in the Solar System is Carmen Sandiego?*™ • through June 28
Saturdays 11 a.m.; Sundays, 1:30 p.m.; Wednesdays through June 20, 2 p.m.
Carmen Sandiego and her V.I.L.E. gang have stolen the rings of Saturn, and the AOE Spaceport agency is recruiting detectives. Travel through the solar system collecting clues to bring Carmen to justice. Grades elementary and up; 55 minutes

*Treasures of the Milky Way* • June 24–Aug. 8
Wednesdays 3 p.m.; Saturdays 2 p.m.
Take one last voyage as Buckingham Red guides you through the universe. Our system collecting clues to bring Carmen to justice. Grades 5 and up; 50 minutes

*The Endless Horizon* • July 4–Aug. 9
Saturdays 3 p.m.; Sundays 3 p.m.
This program about exploration and science follows the travels of Columbus through voyages by robot probes past the planets of our solar system. Grades 6 and up; 45 minutes

*Where in the Universe is Carmen Sandiego?™* was created, written and produced by Dr. William Gutsch under license and in conjunction with The Learning Company. Carmen Sandiego™, Where in the Universe is Carmen Sandiego™, Where in Space is Carmen Sandiego™ and software are trademarks of The Learning Company. Where in the Universe is Carmen Sandiego™ was created, written and produced by Dr. William Gutsch under license and in conjunction with The Learning Company. Carmen Sandiego™, Where in the Universe is Carmen Sandiego™, Where in Space is Carmen Sandiego™ and software are trademarks of The Learning Company.

**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)373-7985 for more details and to make reservations.

**GROUP JUNIOR MISSIONS**

Specially designed 90-minute missions for ages 8 and up. Pre-flight activities prepare junior astronauts for an exciting flight in our spacecraft simulator. Excellent programs for schools and other clubs. Ages 8 & up; minimum of 8, maximum of 14 participants. Registration and $50 non-refundable deposit required at least two weeks prior to mission date. $10/person.

**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 web site at www.kalamazoomuseum.org.
The popularity of on-line auction sites has added a new dimension to the Museum’s hunt for artifacts with local historical links.

Once or twice a week, our staff visits these sites on a search for items associated with Kalamazoo.

A recent quest spotted a bracelet that had belonged to a former member of the Kalamazoo Lassies. The bracelet spelled “LASSIES” and had both baseball and bat charms as well.

We entered a bid and waited for the end of the auction. Luck was with us and the bracelet is now part of the Museum’s permanent collection.

Because the bracelet is more than 50 years old and did not come from its original owner, we don’t know which Lassie wore the bracelet. Still, it strengthens the Museum’s collection of Lassies’ memorabilia.

As baseball fans know, the Kalamazoo Lassies were members of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League in the 1940s and 1950s. The team was originally based in Muskegon but relocated to Kalamazoo in 1950. They played the 1951 through 1954 seasons at Riverfront Park.

The league had been organized in 1943 to provide baseball entertainment during World War II when many Major League stars were serving in the military. The story of the league and the women who played in it were featured in the movie, “A League of Their Own.”

The league was popular during the war years and in its immediate aftermath, but interest declined during the 1950s. The final season was 1954 and the Lassies won the league championship.

This particular search of on-line auctions proved successful and netted a nice catch for the Museum’s permanent collection, one that recalls a very special era in professional baseball history, and in the community’s history.

Above: The 1954 Kalamazoo Lassies in their championship year, with manager Mitch Skuplen. The Lassies bracelet, shown at the top of the page, features ball and bat charms and is now part of the KVM collection.
THEATER Summer ’09 Events

Mary Jane Stryker

3rd ANNUAL NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM
May 8 • 6 p.m. – Free
Join us for a sneak peak of our summer exhibit Jump to Japan: Discovering Culture Through Popular Art. Attend free drawing classes and tour the museum.

MUSIC AT THE MUSEUM
7:30 p.m.
May 7: Who Hit John? • $5
Bluegrass, folk, roots music

June 4: bLuE daHlIa • $5
Indie/alternative stylings

READING RAINBOW – Wednesdays • 12:15 p.m.
June 24: Abiyoyo
In this South African folk story, a boy and his father come up with a plan to save the townspeople from the giant, Abiyoyo.

July 1: Worksong
A gentle rhyme of the working world and of people doing all kinds of work.

July 8: The Bicycle Man
In a small village in Japan, two American soldiers do amazing tricks on a borrowed bicycle.

July 15: Mummies Made in Egypt
This book describes the techniques and the reasons for the use of mummification in ancient Egypt. (This show has been excerpted and used in our mummy exhibit on the 3rd floor.)

July 22: Alistair in Outer
Alistair is on his way to return his library books when he is captured in a spaceship by two creatures called Goots.

July 29: Dinosaur Bob and His Adventures With the Family Lazardo
A vacationing family finds a dinosaur they name Bob. The family brings Bob back to America where he becomes the talk of the town when it is discovered that he plays baseball.

Aug. 5: The Paper Crane
A generous restaurant owner receives a wonderful magical gift from a stranger—a paper crane that magically comes alive and dances.

NASA PARTY • July 18–22
Celebrate both the anniversary of the creation of NASA as well as the first moon landing. Planetarium shows and Challenger Mini-missions are $3 each; the movie and Reading Rainbow episodes are free. Reservations are required for CLC as space is limited to 14 people. For ages 8 and up. Children under the age of 12 must be accompanied by an adult. Call (269) 373-7990 for more details and reservations.

FREE SUNDAY DOCUMENTARIES
Visit the Earth’s most resourceful animals in remote and unusual settings.

Saturday, July 18
11 a.m.: planetarium show—Space Bus
1:30 p.m.: Moon Mini-Mission—Return to the Moon™
2 p.m.: planetarium show—Treasures of the Milky Way
3 p.m.: Moon Mini-Mission—Return to the Moon™
3 p.m.: planetarium show—The Endless Horizon

Sunday, July 19
1:30 p.m.: Movie—In The Shadow of the Moon
1:30 p.m.: planetarium show—Space Bus
3 p.m.: planetarium show—The Endless Horizon

Monday, July 20
11 a.m.: Reading Rainbow—Beegu
2 p.m.: Reading Rainbow—Alistair in Outer

Tuesday, July 21
11 a.m.: Reading Rainbow: Space Case
2 p.m.: Reading Rainbow: Beegu
8:30–11 p.m.: Eclipse viewing

Wednesday, July 22
12:15 p.m.: Reading Rainbow: Alistair in Outer
1:30 p.m.: Moon Mini-Mission

1:30 p.m.
June 21: The Building of the Earth
July 12: The Jungle
July 26: The Community of the Skies
Aug. 16: Worlds Apart
3 p.m.
June 21: The Frozen Earth
July 12: Seas of Grass
July 26: Sweet Fresh Water
Aug. 16: Oceans

4 p.m.
June 21: The Northern Forests
July 12: The Baking Deserts
July 26: The Margins of the Land
Aug. 16: New World

Looking for Lincoln
Aug. 30 • 1:30 p.m
Dissect the myths that have grown up around Abraham Lincoln, and the outstanding questions surrounding him on race, equality, religion, depression, and sexuality.

Animals Among Us
Sept. 13 • 1:30 p.m.
Discover one man’s unsuspecting journey into the backwoods, fields, and swamps of his hometown, where he discovers a remarkably diverse community of wildlife living quietly among the citizens of Kalamazoo. Following the film, videographer Matthew Clysdale will participate in a discussion with the audience.
Summer World Tour

SUMMER HANDS-ON PROGRAMS

Wednesdays
1–4 P.M.
FREE!

ALL 7 CONTINENTS!

June 24: Africa
July 1: Asia
July 8: Europe
July 15: Antarctica
July 22: South America
July 29: North America
Aug. 5: Australia

Join us this summer as we tour the world. Discover traditional and contemporary art and culture as we explore one continent at a time. Make different musical instruments, jewelry, hats, toys, and art each week on this summer’s world tour!

Kalamazoo Valley Museum
230 N. Rose Street
Downtown Kalamazoo
FREE General Admission—Open Daily
HOURS: Mon.–Sat. 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
(First floor re-opens at 6:30 p.m. for Thursday-evening events in the Mary Jane Stryker Theater)
Sundays & Holidays 1 to 5 p.m.
(269)373-7990 • (800)772-3370
www.kalamazoomuseum.org