



History Explorer

Historical Society of Greater Lansing

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February 2019

Upcoming Events

Alois Lang, Master Woodcarver

by Tim Gleisner

Wednesday, February 20 – 7:00 p.m.

Library of Michigan – 702 W. Kalamazoo

Tim Gleisner, Head of Special Collections at the Library of Michigan, will be discussing the life and work of master woodcarver Alois Lang. Lang (1872-1954) was a Master Woodcarver at the American Seating Company and one of the artists responsible for bringing the medieval art of ecclesiastical carving to life in the United States.

Lang was born in Oberammergau, Bavaria, a town long known for its excellence in wood carving. He was apprenticed to his cousin Andreas Lang around the age of 14 and moved to the United States in 1890 at the age of 19. Lang first found work in Boston carving elaborate mantelpieces for Back Bay families. In 1903, Lang moved westward and joined the American Seating Company of Manitowoc, Wisconsin, moving with the firm to Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 1927. There Lang became well known as a prominent ecclesiastical woodcarver. In 1946 the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts, and Letters presented him with a special award for his contribution to art in Michigan.

Lang's carvings can be seen in the following churches in Michigan: Christ Church, Cranbrook, Bloomfield Hills; National Shrine of the Little Flower, Royal Oak; Saint Paul's Episcopal Church, Lansing; First (Park) Congregational Church, Grand Rapids; Grosse Pointe Memorial Church, Grosse Pointe; and Hope Church (Reformed Church in America), Holland.

Outside of Michigan, Lang's work is represented at: Rockefeller Chapel and Wicker Park Lutheran Church, Chicago, Illinois; Christ Episcopal Church, Ottawa,

Illinois; The Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Rockford, Illinois; Christ Episcopal Cathedral, Salina, Kansas; Christ Church, Boston, Massachusetts; Church of the Incarnation, Great Falls, Montana; and All Saints Church, Pasadena, California.

Tim Gleisner has been Head of Special Collections of the Library of Michigan for the last year. Before that he worked as Head of Special Collections at the Grand Rapids Public Library for 12 years. During that time Tim became acquainted with Alois Lang and the furniture industry in Grand Rapids and West Michigan. Tim's talk will delve into how master artists like Lang helped to create an image for the furniture industry of Michigan. Discover how this master woodcarver not only changed the religious art here in Lansing, but in Michigan as a whole.

The Faygo Book

By Joe Grimm

Thursday, March 21, 2019 – 7:00 p.m.

Library of Michigan – 702 W. Kalamazoo Street

“Remember when you were a kid?” If you're from Michigan chances are that's all you need to hear to start humming and thinking about Faygo, one of our favorite beverages for the last century.

On Thursday evening, March 21, HSGL and the Library of Michigan will be hosting a program by former *Detroit Free Press* reporter and current MSU Professor of Journalism Joe Grimm, the author of *The Faygo Book*, a 2018 Michigan notable title.

Faygo's history dates back over a century when the Feigenson family opened a pop-bottling business in

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The Beach Boys — Live at MSU, October 21, 1966

by Bob Mainfort

The January/February 2019 issue of *Michigan History* included an article on the October 22, 1966, performances by the Beach Boys at the University of Michigan, which were released in digital format by Capitol Records in December 2016. The previous night, the group played for a homecoming crowd at Michigan State University. These concerts were essentially a tune-up immediately before the grueling European tour upon which the band embarked on October 23.

The tour was scheduled to promote the latest Beach Boys album, *Pet Sounds*, which was one of the first “concept albums” produced by a rock group and represented a marked change from the band’s string of hits that extolled cars, girls, and surfing. As such, neither fans nor the music industry knew quite what to make of the newly released songs and, despite effusive praise from Paul McCartney, sales of the album were slow in the United States.

Nonetheless, the MSU concert, scheduled for 8:00 p.m. in Jenison Field House, was a sellout. In an inconvenient bit of scheduling, a homecoming pep rally was slated for an hour earlier behind the field house.

Two published reviews of the concert are available, offering different perspectives on the Beach Boys’ performance. The “Teen Writer” for the *Lansing State Journal* (10-23-1966:44) was upbeat, noting the “jammed house Friday night at Jenison Field House” and that the “spirited group performed for a full hour.” During the show, guitarist Al Jardine brought down the house when he remarked, “By the way, congratulations on your win tomorrow.” And, indeed, in the homecoming game, MSU beat a very good Purdue team, featuring Bob Griese at quarterback, 41 to 20. For the band’s appearance at MSU, noted the Teen Writer, the group wore “blue checked cowboy shirts for the first time and white levis.” Prior to this, the Beach Boys signature stage apparel featured shirts with wide vertical stripes that resembled recycled tablecloths from a greasy-spoon restaurant.

In contrast, a writer for the *State News* (10-24-1966:4) was highly critical of the Beach Boys’ performance in a story with

the headline “Beach Boys disappointing,” and a subhead of, “Knew it, too.” The latter referred to a brief press conference before the show, during which Carl Wilson said, “We know we won’t be that good tonight. We haven’t been together for a month, and I guess it will show.” The writer editorialized, “It did.” In fact, the

Beach Boys had already toured extensively in 1966, and the MSU concert came after a hiatus of only 20 days — a rest period that the band desperately needed — and hardly would have been “rusty.”

The *State News* writer praised the warm-up act, The Standells, one of the classic one-hit wonder garage bands of the mid-’60s, and claimed that “they were a hit, while the better-known Beach Boys failed to live up to their image.”

After a long intermission (they *always* feel that way) following the Standells performance, the Beach Boys were ready, and “the audience eagerly waited through the first few numbers for them to warm up. The sound men were partly to blame for not connecting one of the microphones and connecting several other things they shouldn’t have. But it was still obvious that little rehearsing had been done. Onstage, the Beach Boys discussed what routines they would use, apologizing to the audience.” Clearly the writer was very put off by the lengthy intermission, but in fairness to the band, she should have mentioned the reason for this was that Capitol Records was recording the concert for possible release as an album.

Finally, the *State News* writer felt compelled to add, “Another disappointment to the audience was Brian Wilson’s absence. He stayed at home to compose new music, sending friend Bruce Johnston in his place.” This criticism was a bit misguided on several counts. First, Brian Wilson had ceased live performances over a year before the MSU gig, and Bruce Johnston did a credible job filling in. Second, it is hard to imagine that the audience was “disappointed” or even knew that Brian Wilson was not playing. Finally, there was no carping about Brian’s absence during the



Figure 1: The Beach Boys, summer 1966 promotional photo.
Lansing State Journal 10-23-1966:44.

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Figure 2: Excerpt from promotional pamphlet from the Beach Boys UK tour, November 1966.

Beach Boys' subsequent European tour.

The two local writers shed additional light on a point rather seized upon by Christopher Blaker, the writer of the *Michigan History* article. During one of the UM concerts, the irrepressible Mike Love of the Beach Boys told the audience that, for the first time ever, the band had been picketed “over at *that place*” (i.e., MSU). This bit of onstage banter was taken at face value by

Blaker, leaving the implication that there had been a sizable anti-Beach Boys protest at MSU. Information provided by both of the previously cited newspaper articles show that this was not at all the case.

In fact, the pre-concert picketing consisted of “a boy and a girl carrying signs that read ‘Down with the Beach Boys — up with music.’” Evidently, the desultory protestors, both music majors, abandoned their signs, as Bruce Johnston brought one of the signs to the group’s brief press conference, and the group “made a little humor over the incident.”

What about the quality of the Beach Boys’ performance at MSU? For starters, the show marked the first time that the band performed their iconic hit “Good Vibrations” onstage. That alone was well worth the paltry price of admission. Three songs from the concert, all from *Pet Sounds*, were selected for inclusion in the “Pet Sounds 50th Anniversary Box Set.” “Sloop John B” had been part of the Beach Boys setlist since at least April 1966. The acoustic guitar intro is very clean and sufficiently loud throughout the song. “God Only Knows” and “Wouldn’t It Be Nice” were added to the band’s stage show in July 1966. Even when stripped of the complex instrumentation of the album versions, the vocal harmonies carry the day, and all three performances are quite satisfactory. Taking these songs as representative of the concert as a whole, there was no basis for the criticism published in the *State News*.

The aftermath: Departing the States on October 23, the Beach Boys played the first concert of the European tour in Paris on October 25. Then it was on to Germany for eight shows. The group also performed in Austria, Denmark, and Sweden, before moving on to England, where they played 16 concerts in nine days. The

English fans loved *Pet Sounds* and the band’s live performances. When the results of the annual *New Musical Express* polls were announced on December 10, 1966, the Beach Boys topped the voting for the world’s outstanding vocal group, receiving more votes than the Beatles. As a writer for *NME* put it, “The Beach Boys are a success because they sing well, play well, live well and have a musical genius hiding in Beverly Hills writing for them – Brian Wilson!”

Upcoming Events - *Cont'd from page 1*

The Faygo Book...

Detroit. Fitting their name on the eight-ounce bottles of strawberry-, grape-, and fruit-punch- flavored pop, however, wasn’t easy. Thus was born, in 1920, “Faygo.”

Soon Faygo became synonymous with Detroit. Grimm’s book is part history of the beverage, and part narrative of the city where it was long headquartered. He weaves tales of advertising gimmicks (including Alex Karras, Tommy Hearn, and Soupy Sales), applauds the company’s quiet support for its workers through labor disputes, and notes that by 1967 the production workforce was 75% African American—perhaps one reason the factory was spared during the riot.

Learn the history of one of Michigan’s most beloved drinks—and enjoy a tasting of some classic Faygo flavors at this fun event!

Thanks to City Pulse for providing material for this article.

Story Tellers Needed!

HSGL is seeking volunteers to pen articles for our stalwart monthly newsletter. We’re looking for stories that are important to you! Maybe you’ve always wanted to learn more about a famous Lansing resident, or trace the history of your neighborhood. You can tell us about the school you attended, or the place where you worship. Maybe there’s a story in your family tree that begs to be shared! We’re interested in any and all ideas. Articles should be about 1,200 words in length, and, if possible, should be accompanied by an image or two. Please send story ideas to info@lansinghistory.org or call 517-282-0671 to pitch an idea.



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