



General Facts

Updated: January 2010



Founded in 1854 as the Grand Rapids Lyceum of Natural History, the **Public Museum** is one of the oldest historical museums in the upper Midwest and among the largest and best-known of public museums in Michigan. The Public Museum's major permanent exhibits are displayed in the Van Andel Museum Center located in downtown Grand Rapids at 272 Pearl Street NW.

- ***The Furniture City.*** Grand Rapids was North America's first center of furniture manufacturing and led the nation in production from 1870 to 1935.
- ***The Streets of Old Grand Rapids.*** Meticulous reproductions of real downtown store fronts from 19th Century Grand Rapids.
- ***Anishinabek: The People of This Place.*** The history and culture of the Ottawa, Potawatomi and Chippewa tribes who still live in the area today.
- ***Newcomers: The People of This Place.*** Significant artifacts and immigration stories from more than forty ethnic groups living in West Michigan.
- ***Habitats.*** The geography and natural history of West Michigan.
- ***Collecting: A to Z.*** An engaging showcase of the Museum's unique collections.

Additional Highlights Include:

- the Roger B. Chaffee Planetarium
- the Meijer Theater featuring a restored Mighty Wurlitzer Theater Organ
- a fully restored and operational 1928 Spillman Carousel
- the skeleton of a 76-foot fin whale and a functional Driggs biplane both suspended above the Galleria
- Permanent exhibits featuring Egyptian mummies, automobiles, fossils, Old Grand Rapids City Hall, military uniforms and much more.
- Museum Curiosity Shop and Café
- Major traveling exhibitions are hosted twice a year. Past exhibits include *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, *Treasures of Ancient Egypt* and *Grossology*.

The Van Andel Museum Center

The foremost display facility of the Public Museum opened in 1994 and was named in honor of its Capital Campaign Chairman and largest donor, Jay Van Andel, and his wife Betty. The building has 80,000 square feet of permanent exhibit space and is located on the west bank of the Grand River in downtown Grand Rapids.



The Museum Center's burnt-orange and red brick 19th century Dutch-style architecture is reminiscent of the city's old mills and furniture factories. The building design employs natural light as a major architectural element. From inside, the large windows frame the historic Grand River by day. At night, they allow an

intriguing view of the Museum's treasures – including the whale skeleton and the carousel - from the adjacent bridges and vantage points on the river's east side.

Building Highlights:

- The lobby rotunda welcomes visitors with graceful female figures from Grand Rapids' 1881 City Hall on one side and a section of the Berlin Wall on the other side.
- Spanning the entire east side of the building and enclosed with floor-to-ceiling windows is the Galleria. It is adorned with 19th century tiles from the old City Hall.
- The Grand Staircase includes landings and oriel windows for pausing and reflecting on the outdoor beauty of the river and the panorama of the central city.
- The Cook Carousel Pavilion, built on pilings over the Grand River houses one of the most prominent attractions of the Museum - the fully restored 1928 Spillman Carousel.
- A 9,500 square foot gallery on the 3rd floor accommodates traveling exhibitions.
- The Ford Promenade, a public walkway along the river's edge and around the carousel pavilion, is named in honor of long-time Museum supporter President Gerald R. Ford.
- The building is completely accessible and barrier free. After hours, it is available for receptions and meetings of up to 2,000 guests.

The Van Andel Museum Center is open every day of the year except Christmas, New Years, Easter and Thanksgiving. Hours are 9 to 5 Monday through Saturday, Noon to 5 Sunday. General admission is \$8 for adults; \$7 for seniors; \$3 for ages 3 through 17. Call 616/456-3977 or visit www.grmuseum.org.

The Furniture City

The Public Museum has an extensive collection of furniture made in Grand Rapids from the 1840s to the 1990s. Over 120 pieces of furniture from the top collections in the country are showcased in "*The Furniture City*" exhibit located on the 2nd floor.



Across the hall is a 30-foot high, 35-ton 1905 Corliss-type steam engine with an 18-foot flywheel which once powered a furniture factory near Big Rapids, Michigan. Now driven by an electrical motor, it transfers power via an overhead system of pulleys and line shafts to the partially operational recreation of the Phoenix Furniture Factory ca. 1910 in "*The Furniture City*." In the recreated factory room

Museum volunteers operate authentic 19th century machines to make dowels and other furniture parts like those mass-produced here more than 100 years ago.

Highlights:

- A vignette of a 1920s Grand Rapids Furniture Market showroom and references to classical architecture of downtown Grand Rapids buildings during that era.

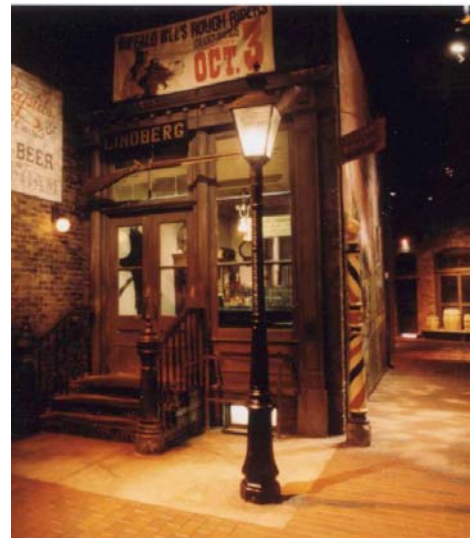
- Multi-media presentations, a detailed miniature factory and the only existing 1920 Lorraine Touring Car which was manufactured in Grand Rapids.
- Painted silk banners from furniture industry labor unions along with carvings, historical photos, clothing and souvenirs of the industry and community.
- A companion book, "*Grand Rapids Furniture: The Story of America's Furniture City*" is available in the Museum Curiosity Shop.

The Streets of Old Grand Rapids

This full-scale re-creation of a Grand Rapids streetscape during the 1890s takes visitors back in time to the turn-of-the-century. The 11 shops and facades in the exhibit are based on actual buildings or photographs of Grand Rapids storefronts in the 1890s.

Highlights:

- Prominently displayed near the entrance is a restored original 1880s Grand Rapids street car.
- One enters *The Streets of Old Grand Rapids* through a replica of the old Union Train Depot waiting room.
- Life in the 1890s is depicted by street scene murals and continuous "street sound" audio effects. An antique automobile and a high-wheeler bicycle visitors can actually "ride" provide additional period detail.
- The interiors of Voigt-Herpolsheimer Department Store, Rudell Drug Store and the Print Shop are frequently staffed by trained volunteers and open for visitors to explore. Other businesses include Powers Theater, a gun shop and a grocery.



Anishinabek: The People of This Place

Anishinabek: The People of This Place is the story of the Native Americans of West Michigan told in their own voices and with historic and contemporary objects important to their culture.



"Anishinabek" - meaning the real people - is a name many Indian tribes of middle and eastern North America use to identify themselves. During the 1800s, while many Native American tribes were being removed from their lands to Kansas and Oklahoma reservations, most of Michigan's Anishinabek - the Ottawa, Potawatomi and Chippewa Indians who lived in villages throughout the Great Lakes region - used

skillful negotiation and hard work to remain in their ancestral homelands.

This exhibit explores the ultimate success of these people to remain as citizens of Michigan and details the high price that was often paid for that accomplishment. Today, over 25,000 Anishinabek live in West Michigan. Through direct quotes, family photographs and interactive video interviews, Museum visitors will learn of the sacrifices, the achievements, and the on-going struggle of the Anishinabek to preserve and protect their cultural heritage.

Highlights:

- Hundreds of objects from the Public Museum's collections of decorative arts, clothing and tools as well as hundreds of photographs, mostly borrowed from collections of Anishinabe families.
- Contemporary video interviews with elders, parents, artists and professionals that explore historic and contemporary Anishinabe culture.
- Funding for *Anishinabek: The People of This Place* was provided in part by the Frey Foundation, National Endowment for the Humanities, Michigan Humanities Council, State of Michigan Equity Program, and Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs.

Newcomers: The People of This Place

This companion exhibit to *Anishinabek* explores and celebrates ethnicity and immigration in West Michigan. The exhibition includes more than 600 artifacts and images drawn from the Museum's and other community collections.

Highlights:

- The exhibit presents the personal stories of individuals and families according to a series of themes: *Leaving the Homeland, Coming to Grand Rapids, Settling In, Making a Living, Building a Family, Creating Community, Realizing Identity*, and finally *Creating A New Place*.
- The *Newcomers* exhibit provides interactive experiences for families and school groups. Curriculum materials will be a part of diversity curriculums used in numerous districts in West Michigan.
- *Newcomers* was developed with the support and encouragement of the National Endowment for the Humanities, in hopes that it can serve as a national model for exhibitions dealing with issues of cultural identity and ethnic diversity in urban areas.



Habitats

This 3rd floor exhibit explores the ways in which humans are active participants in the natural world and includes the following sections:

Kent Scientific Institute: A re-creation of the Public Museum's exhibits before 1900 – this represents our understanding of nature prior to the 1900s. A portion of the Museum's extensive collections of shells, fossils, minerals and animals are featured in a Victorian-era museum setting. These specimens are arranged by their scientific classification and include a full-scale replica of the Museum's well-known Mastodon skeleton.



Mammal Hall: A re-creation of the Museum's exhibits from 1940 - The design of these exhibits reflects the principles of the conservation movement, which flourished between 1900 and 1965. These exhibits exemplify this era by focusing on individual animals rather than the communities in which they live.

Introductory Theater – Get a bird's perspective of the West Michigan landscape in this video presentation.

Dioramas and Information Stations - The story of the natural environment of the Grand River Valley is brought to light in open-air dioramas showing plants and animals in their natural settings. Complete presentations of sand dune, marsh, wood lot and cropland plant and animal habitats are accompanied by information stations using light, sound, images, text and interactive components to explain the features of each environment.

Collecting: A to Z



This engaging showcase of the Public Museum's unique collections is located on all three floors of the Museum Center. Some objects are exquisitely beautiful, some rare, some precious and some bizarre – such as strange forms of money, old medical devices and mysterious carvings in ivory. Every object tells a story. It may be the story of its origin, its use, its historical era, or its collector.

Highlights: A is for Automobiles, B is for Boxes, C is for City Hall, D is for Dolls, E is for Electricity, F is for Fossils, G is for Glass, H is for Hats, I is for Ivory, J is for Japan, K is for Knives and Guns, L is for Lighting, M is for Musical Instruments, N is for Numismatics, O is for Oddities, P is for Pewter, Q is for Quilts, R is for Rocks, S is for Stamps, T is for Toys, U is for U.S.A, V is for Veterans, W is for Watches and Clocks, X is for X Marks the Spot, Y is for Yearling and Z is for Zoology.

The 1928 Spillman Engineering Co. Carousel

A vividly painted antique Spillman Carousel operates in the Cook Carousel Pavilion off the 1st floor Galleria. Manufactured by the Spillman Engineering Company of North Tonawanda, New York in 1928, the carousel is one of only three of its style known to have been produced by the company. It revolves to the music of a Wurlitzer band organ and offers rides year-round to Museum visitors young and old.

Highlights:

- Forty-four hand-carved, elaborately jeweled wooden horses, two chariots and six menagerie animals: a giraffe, lion, deer, goat, tiger and camel. The animals have been fully restored to their original color and design with enameled acrylic paints.
- Original ticket booth, art nouveau painted panels, a rare interior ceiling, carved frieze and brass poles
- 1,200 lights adorn the carousel canopy and outline its decorative panels.
- The carousel occupies its own glass and cast stone pavilion, made possible through a generous donation by Peter and Pat Cook who led a community campaign to acquire the carousel in 1981. The loss of the community's beloved carousel at East Grand Rapids' Ramona Park on Reeds Lake prompted the search.



Mighty Wurlitzer Theater Organ

Built in 1928 to accompany silent films, sing-alongs and newsreels the *Mighty Wurlitzer Theater Organ* is a functioning showpiece of the Museum's Meijer Theater. It contains over 2,000 pipes ranging in size from six inches to sixteen feet and can imitate a full orchestra. Sound effects include drums, marimbas, a train whistle, bird chirps and a telephone bell. The organ came to Grand Rapids in 1977 to entertain patrons of the former Roaring '20s/Good Time Charley's restaurant.

Restoration and installation in the museum was made possible by the donations of hundreds of organ enthusiasts in the museum's "Operation Organ Transplant" fund drive.

Roger B. Chaffee Planetarium

Named after the Grand Rapids-born astronaut who lost his life in the 1967 Apollo 1 spacecraft fire, the Museum's Planetarium Sky Theater is complete with computerized Digistar and laser projectors, high-powered digital sound system, multiple video and slide projectors, and numerous special effects. It is the setting for a variety of programs, such as audio-visual astronomy shows, concerts, readings and dramas using special sound and visual effects in addition to night sky simulation.

Highlights:

- Digistar simulation device capable of projecting a view of the universe from any point in space as well as an infinite variety of CAD programs
- Wide angle video and laser projectors
- Multiple dynamic speakers
- Accommodations for visitors with special needs



Voigt House Victorian Museum

Built in 1895, the Voigt House Victorian Museum offers visitors an intimate view of the life of a prominent Michigan family in the late 19th/early 20th century. Located at 115 College Ave. SE in historic Heritage Hill, the three-story treasure was home to the well-known Voigt family, successful Grand Rapids merchants and flour mill entrepreneurs.



Chateau-esque architecture is complemented by the period features within the house. The original carpets and silk wall-coverings provide the backdrop for displays of family possessions.

Ralph Voigt, the youngest child and a bachelor who lived in the house his entire life, died in 1971. He left fifty percent of the estate to the Grand Rapids Foundation. It later became the property of the Public Museum.

The Voigt House is currently closed to the public except for special events, including Octoberfest, held annually the first weekend in October.