



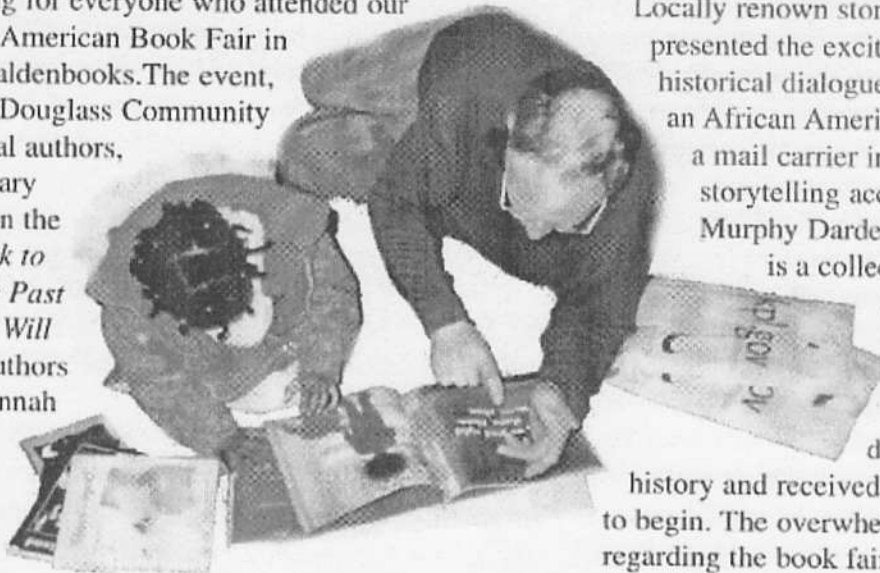
Southwest Michigan Black Heritage Society

Spring 2005 • Newsletter



African American Book Fair a Success

There was something for everyone who attended our first annual African American Book Fair in conjunction with Waldenbooks. The event, held Feb. 12, at the Douglass Community Center, featured local authors, storytellers and literary critics who shared on the theme: *Looking Back to the Future: How the Past Influences What We Will Become*. Featured authors included: Buddy Hannah (*I Don't Know Much, But I Know What I Know*) Mard Little (*With God on My Side*) John Davis (*African American History Crossword and Activity Book*) and Sonya Bernard-Hollins (*Here I Stand: A Musical History of African Americans in Battle Creek, Michigan*). Featured literary critics included: Dr. Deborah Barnes, director of the Lewis Walker Institute-WMU. Barnes is a founding member, past vice president and program director of the Toni Morrison Society. She gave an analysis of the Toni Morrison novel, *Beloved*. Denise Miller, poet, did a reading and interpretation of her poem about Elizabeth Garner from Morrison's novel. Dr. Michelle Johnson, Zora Neale Hurston scholar, gave an analysis of Hurston's work.



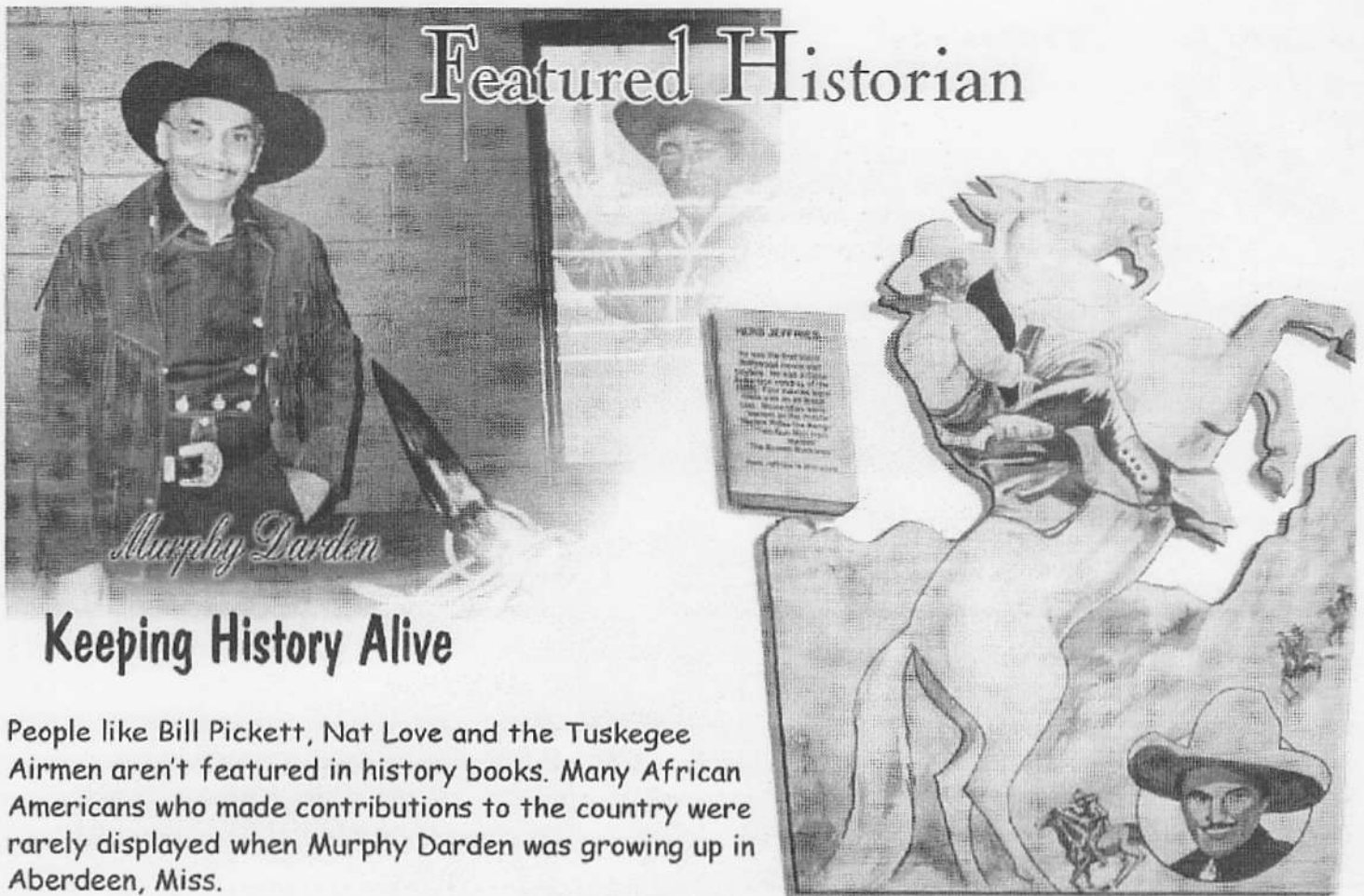
Locally renown storyteller, Miss. Nettie, presented the exciting and entertaining historical dialogue of *Stagecoach Mary*, an African American woman who became a mail carrier in the West. The storytelling accentuated the display of Murphy Darden, a local historian who is a collector of African American cowboy memorabilia. During the event, attendees also learned the importance of documenting their family history and received free information on how to begin. The overwhelmingly positive response regarding the book fair has inspired us to host an African American book fair every February. The event could not have been a success without those in the community who donated their services, facilities, time and childrens books for this event.



Special thanks goes to:
Douglass Community Center
Kalamazoo Public Library
Turn 2 Foundation
Kalamazoo Public Schools
Common Cents Realty



Featured Historian



Murphy Darden

Keeping History Alive

People like Bill Pickett, Nat Love and the Tuskegee Airmen aren't featured in history books. Many African Americans who made contributions to the country were rarely displayed when Murphy Darden was growing up in Aberdeen, Miss.

Today, those who know Darden will learn of these men and others through his extensive collection of African American memorabilia. Darden retired from James Rivers KVP paper mill in 1990. After retirement, he focused on his passion, African American memorabilia collecting. He began with items featuring African American cowboys, then added Buffalo Soldiers, Tuskegee Airmen and many others. Items from his collection have been displayed at Kalamazoo Institute of the Arts and Galesburg Museum among other locations.

His collections and his artwork featuring African Americans, show the depth and value African Americans have made to the United States since slavery.

Darden hopes to one day complete a book about his life and the memorabilia he collects. An ultimate goal is to open a museum where he can share his collection with the community.

Thank you Murphy Darden for helping keep our history alive!

Upcoming Events of the Southwest Michigan Black Heritage Society

April 11- "Creating a Family History: Capturing, Preserving and Compiling Memories,"
7 p.m., Kalamazoo Public Library Van Deusen Room, 315 S. Rose St., Kalamazoo

April 15- Quarterly Membership meeting, 6:30 p.m.
Douglass Community Center,
1000 W. Paterson St., Kalamazoo.

April 30-History Detectives meetings, 11 a.m.
Douglass Community Center

May 19- Doing Oral Histories, 6:30 p.m. Kalamazoo Public Library, Van Deusen Room

May 26- Conservation & Preservation of family documents, 6:30 p.m. KPL, Van Deusen Room

July 11 - 15- History Detectives Freedom Camp
8:30 a.m. - 2 p.m. Kalamazoo Valley Museum

Sept. 10 - Dec. 10- History Detectives sessions
10 a.m. - 1 p.m. Saturdays (Various Locations)

President's Address

It's been a year since the Southwest Michigan Black Heritage Society first began our mission to research and document area African American history. We began to also educate the community on the importance of genealogy through exhibitions, workshops, seminars and publications.

We have been busy! We've already held a series on *Creating a Family History*, completed research on the Underground Railroad area in Southwest Michigan, and held a successful African American book fair in conjunction with Waldenbooks.

We also plan to collaborate with others in surrounding communities who have the same interest in preserving history. We have met with the NAACP-Three Rivers branch, to help in the documentation of their local history. We are participating in Kalamazoo Public Library's Reading Together program by providing a series entitled *Creating a Family History*. Our History Detectives program will involve area teens who will help us research local people, events and places in our community. Their work will become part of the future regional African American research library of primary and secondary sources at the Powell Branch Library. It will also provide research guidance and resources, and provide training in conservation.

Collaborative efforts with other agencies and organizations, such as universities and colleges, foundations and other groups interested in documenting, preserving and promoting African American history in Southwest Michigan will be pursued. These partnerships will also serve to establish a general awareness in the community of the importance of the subject.

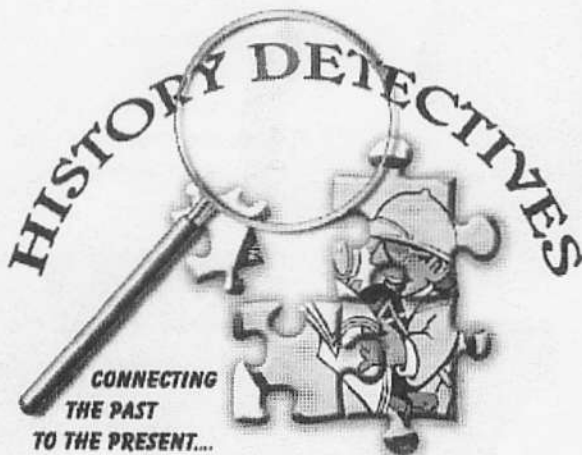
We invite you to join in our efforts by presenting any ideas for future projects. Join us at our next general meeting at the Douglass Community Center on April 15, 2005.

Thank you, for working with us to become Southwest Michigan's "Connection to Yesterday."

Donna Odom
President

Pat Bell-Phillips
Secretary

Sonya Hollins
Treasurer



SMBHS has created a program to get teens excited about their local history--History Detectives! This three-month program will teach students how to research, archive and preserve family and local history. What the students discover will be used to present to various schools and organizations, and display at area libraries.

We are still seeking area high school students who love history and have creative talents which would help us display our history to the community.

If you know of a student in grade 9-12th, who would be an asset to this program, please contact Donna Odom at (269) 873-2327.