

HANS BALDAUF

He Brought the Stars to Kalamazoo

by Eric Schreur

On May 23, 1959, the then Kalamazoo Public Museum began offering programs in a state-of-the-art Spitz Model 2 planetarium.

The facility was the inspiration of Hans Baldauf, the president of the Kalamazoo Amateur Astronomical Association (KAAA), now the Kalamazoo Astronomical Society.

Baldauf persuaded Alexis Praus, the museum director, that a planetarium would be an excellent educational opportunity at a time when Americans were increasingly concerned with improving instruction in the sciences.

The association raised \$11,000 and the Kalamazoo Foundation contributed \$24,000 to make the planetarium a reality.

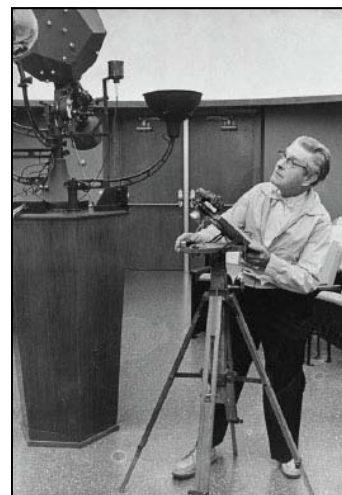


In 1966, the Kalamazoo Board of Education, which then governed the Museum, named the planetarium in honor of Baldauf, who had died the previous year.

But who was Hans Baldauf?

Given his role in the KAAA, Baldauf obviously had an interest in science. That, however, is just the tip of the iceberg.

For if Kalamazoo had a true “Renaissance Man” in the 1950s, it would have been Hans Baldauf.



Baldauf was first and foremost an artist. He earned a master's degree in sculpture from the Royal Academy of Dresden in his native Germany. Before coming to Kalamazoo, he worked as an engineering draftsman who helped design the aerial bridge for Chicago's Wrigley Building.

He came to Kalamazoo, however, not as an artist but as a musician. In 1933, he and his wife, music instructor Lillian Pringle Baldauf, joined the Kalamazoo Symphony Orchestra as cellists. Both had performed professionally, touring the country with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

Once settled in Kalamazoo, he was employed in the art department of the Kalamazoo Vegetable Parchment Company until 1951 and later as an artist at the International Paper Company. Interestingly, Baldauf was one of a dozen or so members of the symphony employed at KVP, earning a living while still practicing their music.

After he retired in 1958, Baldauf devoted himself to his hobbies that included mathematics and astronomy. He not only spearheaded the effort to build a planetarium at the then -new museum but he developed numerous lectures that he offered as part of the planetarium's programming. He designed and built his own telescopes and projectors that he used as an amateur astronomer.

Born in 1892, Baldauf was 18 years old when Halley's Comet appeared in 1910. The comet, which was easily

visible to the naked eye at that time, spurred his life-long interest in astronomy.

Artist, sculptor, musician, mathematician, and astronomer — these may have been more than enough interests for most people. Baldauf, however, added architecture to his resume. He designed the large home that he and his wife owned on Warren Place in Kalamazoo.

Baldauf remained active after his retirement. He made regular presentations in the museum planetarium. His wife, Lillian, died in 1964 and he was married a second time to Alma Limoges. He died on November 11, 1965, at the age of 73.

In January 1966, at the suggestion of Library Director Mark Crum, the Kalamazoo Board of Education named the planetarium in Baldauf's honor. For the next 30 years, until the Museum moved to its new home, school children and Museum visitors learned about the solar system and the Milky Way galaxy in what Baldauf liked to call "the greatest show on earth" — all at the Hans Baldauf Planetarium.

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KALAMAZOO ASTRONOMY CLUB				
September 18, 1965				
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1 Roger McPherson	241 West Orleans St	49078	OX 22191	
2 Mary Butler	2825 Duke St	49001	349-4771	
3 Herbert Butler	" " "	"	"	
4 Gloria Squiers	1329 W Maple St.	49001	FI 4-6479	
5 James Baldauf	1307 Warren Pl.	49007	FI 5-7288	
6 Alma Baldauf	1307 Warren Pl.	49007	FI 5-7288	
7 Robert Limoges	1307 Warren Pl.	49007	FI 5-7288	
8 Mike Knapp	2137 Southorn Avenue	49001	FI 6-0469	
9 Chip Brooks	2206 Southern Ave.	49001	FI 2-1439	
10 Bill Squiers	1329 W Maple St	49001	FI 4-6479	
11 Edgar Paskby	420 Evelyn Ave.	49001	349-8571	
12 Armin Noel				
13 Allen				
14 Brian				
15 C. Colin Noel				

Hans Baldauf was a loyal KAAA member right up until the end. Hans attended his last general meeting on September 18, 1965 - two months before he passed away. His wife, Alma, and step-son, Robert Limoges, continued to attend meetings for several years.