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Museum's Seventh Annual Storytelling Festival kicks off on February 1

The Seventh Annual Storytelling Festival, featuring stories and songs of Life in the Mitten, kicks off with Art Hop on February 1.

6 p.m.: Robin Nott will share stories and songs from Michigan's lumbering and Great Lakes lore. Nott, a retired theater director from Gull Lake Community Schools, has been sharing stories and songs throughout Michigan for years. Hear the Lumberman's Alphabet, the Great Lakes Fishing Trade, and Pea Soup Shorty.

7 p.m.: Storyteller, singer-songwriter, actress, writer, and educator Allison Downey blends the world of music, storytelling, and theater into a one-woman performance piece. She will share her songs about Michigan and stories of family and life in the Mitten. Frequently featured at The Moth in Ann Arbor, Downey joins the Storytelling Festival kickoff during Art Hop.

The Festival continues on Saturday, February 2, with storytellers in the morning and afternoon, a lunchtime concert, and literacy-related vendors and authors throughout the day.

10 a.m.: Jenifer Strauss of Story Be Told shares her program Michigan, My Michigan. Her collection of Great Lakes stories includes lumber-era legends, mining stories, shipwreck and lighthouse tales, mysteries, ghost stories, traditional how and why tales, and personal narratives based on a lifelong love affair with the Mitten State.

11:15 a.m.: Adam Mellema, storyteller, actor, and producer, presents Remembering World War II, stories of Michigan veterans who were there in their own words. Their stories come alive with familiar tunes as the audience watches Mellema age on stage from 18 to 75.

12 p.m.: Singer-songwriter and author Carl "Bearfoot" Behrend is a fourth-generation resident of Michigan's Upper Peninsula, an area rich in stories. He has produced five CDs on the legends of the Great Lakes and has written two books. Bring a lunch or purchase one on site.

1:30 p.m.: Willie W. Payne uses music, song, and photos of Michigan Underground Railroad stops to narrate stories and struggles of southern fugitive slaves to escape captivity. Hear how Michigan abolitionists and free blacks assisted slaves on the Underground Railroad.

2:45 p.m.: Discover the voyage from Montreal to Michigan with Genot "Winter Elk" Picor. Picor is a professional storyteller, musician, and feature writer for The Great Lakes Pilot and The Mackinac Journal. Go back in time and join the journey.

4 p.m.: Benjamin Thompson becomes Sheepshank Sam, an old-time Michigan lumberjack sharing stories of how trees were felled, cut into logs, skidded out of the woods, decked on sleds, stacked along rivers, and floated to saw mills throughout Michigan during the late 1800s.

A full lineup of Michigan authors and books on Michigan for all ages will be available for purchase from Kazoo Books during Author Breaks between the storyteller presentations on Saturday. Don't

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miss a stroll through the Kalamazoo Valley Museum's history gallery, Kalamazoo Direct to You. Discover the history of Southwest Michigan through the Community We Created, the Places We Built, and the Dreams We Shared.

The Kalamazoo Valley Museum is operated by Kalamazoo Valley Community College and is governed by its Board of Trustees.