



Dedication of the Kalevala Mosaics at the Kaleva Centennial Walkway

On May 29, 2021 the Kaleva Historical Society held a dedication of the Kalevala Mosaics by artist, Tricia Boucha. The mosaics are copies of the original Kalevala murals that are based on the Finnish epic poem, the Kalevala. They were painted during the Depression by local youth under the direction of Harry Armstrong. Three of the six murals were chosen by the historical society and the artist to be re-created into beautiful mosaics using colored pieces of glass and other rare and unusual materials.

Boucha moved to Kaleva partly because of the artworks she saw in the town, and soon joined the Kaleva Art Gallery. She then approached the Historical Society relaying her habit of donating a piece of artwork to the communities in which she has lived. Since the murals are such a great example of Kaleva's Finnish heritage, it was decided to use those as the subject of her artwork. She completed the first one in 2020 and through the winter months finished the second and third one.

In the first mosaic which forms the middle of the triad, Vainamoinen, hero of the Kalevala, is riding a horse pulling a sleigh through the dark cold night on his way to North Farm. He has been promised a bride by Louhi, mistress of North Farm, if he will come there and forge the magic Sampo. Many Swarovski crystals appear as stars in the night sky and brilliantly shine in the morning sunshine.

The mosaic on the left in the triad depicts Vainamoinen singing at North Farm. Louhi has summoned together young men with swords destined for Vainamoinen's head. However, Vainamoinen gets his harp and begins to play beautifully. Everybody starts to listen and marvel at the joyous music, laughing and crying at the same time. Eventually the old and young fall asleep to Vainamoinen's music. In this mosaic Boucha has used iridescent, antique German glass and 14K gold -coated wires for the harp.

The mosaic on the right is called "The Loss of the Sampo", which is an object often referred to in the Kalevala. It has magic powers, and Louhi, mistress of the underworld, wants possession of it. She is flying after a ship, in which the Sampo is hidden in a trunk. She flies to the masthead, moves quickly down and seizes the Sampo. But as she thrusts the Sampo into the water, it breaks into bits, and is lost forever. The artist used red glass for the sails as they were made of red wool. She also placed 100 tiny Swarovski crystals in the sky above the ship.

Kaleva's Finnish heritage dates back to early 1900, when Finns came from parts of the U.S. and from Finland, lured by a newspaper called the Siirtolainen. It promised rich, cheap farmland and the town and the streets were named from the Finnish epic poem, the Kalevala. In 1940 as Kaleva celebrated its 40th anniversary the six Kalevala murals were dedicated. They are painted on 3'x8' pieces of wood and as stated before depict scenes from the Finnish epic poem. They hung in the old Kaleva school gymnasium for many years. When it was demolished the historical society took possession of them. Today they hang in the back porch of the Bottle House Museum. Open hours are Sat. noon-4:00 through October.

The Centennial Walkway was started by the Kaleva Norman Dickson Service Learning class to coincide with the 100th anniversary of the town in 2000. The 500 pound grasshopper was the anchor of the walkway along with gardens and an entrance designed by the students. Later the village and the historical society collaborated to add an airplane to honor mayor, Robert Rengo, and a Business/Service tree to honor those who contributed to Kaleva's development. A wire sculpture of Louhi's ship, and three quilt squares honoring Finnish traditions followed. The Kalevala mosaics, located on the south end of the Walkway, are the latest addition. A grant from the Manistee County Community Foundation made the project possible. Thanks to the artist and also to Andy Priest for designing the frames.