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From the Sainte Marie Foundation

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June 12, 2012

Helen Graham Art Exhibit in Sainte Marie

The Sainte Marie State Bank is hosting a summer art exhibit of the paintings of Helen Keller Graham, former Sainte Marie resident who became a well-known Central Illinois artist. Mrs. Graham, a rural Oblong resident, died at age 87 in 2010, but she left a body of artwork for her family that included some of her favorite paintings, many of which are in the exhibit. Residents of Sainte Marie have also loaned paintings they purchased from her over the years. Don Ablinger, president of the Sainte Marie State Bank, often commissioned Mrs. Graham to paint old homes and stores that once populated the village. These are on permanent display at the Bank, so are included in the exhibit.

The exhibit will be open during banking hours, Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday 9 a.m. – 3 p.m. and on Wednesday and Saturday from 9 a.m. to noon until Labor Day weekend. The bank is in the center of Sainte Marie, opposite the post office. The Graham family will be providing a different set of paintings, especially focusing on “barns”, starting in late July.

Helen Keller Graham grew up just outside of Sainte Marie, a daughter of Joseph and Minnie Keller. As a child she found that she could draw practically anything – and she thought everyone could do the same. In her teens, she purchased her first set of oil paints from the Montgomery Ward catalog, paying a princely sum of \$1.09. She married early and did not pursue her art until her three children were well launched. Totally self-taught, she soon received awards and commissions from festivals and art exhibits where she displayed her realistic paintings of central Illinois scenes and people. By the time of her death, her paintings hung in 13 states and several European countries.

In 2008, she donated 17 drawings of “Ladies in Hats 1923” to the Sainte Marie Foundation. These works will be on display at the Foundation House during the June 29 and 30th Quartoseptcentennial Celebration.

For further information, call the Sainte Marie State Bank, 618-455-3355 or Annette Kirts 681-455-3403.

Picture caption: Helen Keller Graham with one of her favorite barn paintings, taken before her 2010 death.