

## Kansas Museum of History Background

### Important Dates

1875 - Kansas State Historical Society founded, various museum items were displayed in spaces at Kansas State Capitol

1914 – Kansas State Historical Society moved to Grand Army of the Republic Memorial Hall, museum exhibits were initially on third floor, and later fourth floor

1984 – Kansas Museum of History is established in a new facility in west Topeka, where the Potawatomi Mission stands, with a special exhibit; the education and archeology offices also move into the new building

1985 – Kansas Museum of History phase I opened with exhibits beginning with the earliest human occupation

1986 – Kansas Museum of History phase II opened with exhibits covering 1854 to 1865

1987– Kansas Museum of History phase III opened with exhibits covering 1920 to 1980s

1989– Kansas Museum of History phase IV opened with exhibits covering 1865 to 1920

1995 – Kansas State Historical Society remaining offices, including administrative, library, archives, newspapers, microfilm, historic preservation, and historic sites, moved to an adjoining building in west Topeka

2022 – Kansas Museum of History closed to the public to begin major renovations

2025 – Kansas Museum of History reopens after major renovation with new exhibits

### The Path to New Exhibits

The planning for new exhibits began more than a decade ago. Our former executive director, Jennie Chinn, was the visionary and leader behind this renovation to provide a “wow” experience our visitors said was missing—something to meet the needs and expectations of 21st-century museum goers. The Kansas Historical Foundation conducted a capital campaign for the new exhibits, raising more than \$6 million toward the project. Jennie oversaw the project and set us on the path, including the decision to structure the gallery thematically. A lot of research and planning was completed before her untimely death in April 2022. The project continued, but her death understandably left a huge gap in knowledge and understanding. Jennie had selected Dimensional Innovations (DI) of Overland Park as partners in the project. DI’s team provides design and fabrication work for industries and companies that span the country. Their creative, outside-the-box thinking was the perfect fit for our goals.

The museum gallery closed to begin major renovations on September 4, 2022. Sarah Bell started her role as museum director shortly afterward in late September 2022. She initially worked to understand the work that had been done and what was yet needed to do. The thematic structure can be an exciting and dynamic approach, while also intricate and challenging. She developed a clear outline after many conversations with staff members, historians, academics, and community members, and much reading and reflecting.

### Major Renovation

While the staff exhibits team of curators, collections, exhibits designers, and researchers identified large artifacts, researched, and wrote final scripts for the thematic sections, DI led regular meetings to discuss and guide the design project. Outside readers contributed a range on content expertise. Teams comprising staff members and state architectural services updated the public spaces with current safety regulations.