

MUSEUM AND EDUCATION

Using stories from Kansas history to encourage new explorations of the past, understand our present, and appreciate the experiences of others; collecting, preserving, and providing access to the state's material culture.

The End is in Sight: MUSEUM REOPENING IN NOVEMBER!

Sarah Bell, PhD,
Museum and Education Division Director

Updates

Since my last *Zephyr* article earlier this year, the museum gallery has undergone a tremendous amount of change. Contractors built and painted walls. The new ramp is finished and provides great views of some favorite artifacts, along with brand new interactive experiences. We designed, fabricated, and installed our new special exhibit, a collaboration with KANSAS! magazine in honor of its 80th anniversary. We wrote an entire script and reviewed hundreds of production art panels. Our collections team is busily cleaning and prepping artifacts. And DI is installing exhibits!

As I write this more than a month ahead of our November 22 reopening, I am feeling a mix of excitement, exhaustion, and exhilaration. Our team has worked incredibly hard to get us to this point, and we are working even harder to finish the final touches.

Before I share what you can expect when you visit, I want to do a brief look at how far we have come.

The museum gallery closed on September 4, 2022. However, planning for the renovation started more than a decade ago. Our former executive director, Jennie Chinn, was the visionary and leader behind this renovation until her unexpected death in April 2022. Jennie selected Dimensional Innovations (DI) because she wanted the new museum to provide a “wow” experience for visitors—something that would meet the needs and expectations of 21st-century visitors. DI is a Kansas company but has done design and fabrication work for industries and companies across the country. Their creative, outside-the-box thinking was the perfect fit for our goals.

Before her death, Jennie set us on the path we are so close to completing, including deciding to structure the gallery thematically. A lot of research and planning had been completed, but her death understandably left a huge gap in our knowledge and understanding of the project.

I started in my role in late September 2022, and my first few months on the job were spent making sense of the work that had been done and what we still needed to do. I also did a lot of listening. A thematic structure is exciting and very dynamic, but it is also challenging to tell history that way. A clear outline finally emerged after many conversations with staff, historians, academics, community members, along with a lot of time spent reading and thinking. After that, it was just a matter of placing our stories and artifacts. And writing the many, many labels to go along with them!





What to Expect When the Museum Reopens

When you walk through our gallery doors, you will enter a space that asks you to consider, What is Kansas? This question, along with accompanying questions, What was Kansas? and Why Kansas?, will set you up for exploring the stories of the new gallery. We know that everyone who walks into the museum comes in with a perception of Kansas. It might be positive, negative, or a mix of both. By asking what is Kansas, we are asking you to confront those perceptions and consider their origin. Yes, Kansas has tornadoes and sunflowers, is the Free State and the Wheat State, and is known for *The Wizard of Oz*. But it is also so much more than that. Kansas is stories of everyday people accomplishing incredible things. Kansas is the heartland, a crossroads, a place of innovation, and a celebration of numerous cultures and traditions.

The rest of the galleries center stories of Kansans who fought for a cause, made their home and a living, created communities, pushed for change, battled adversity, and celebrated their successes. *Bleeding Kansas* tells the story of the turbulent territorial era, how Kansas became a state, and

Kansans' role in the Civil War. *Making Kansas* is rooted in the land and resources from the earth. *Connecting Kansas* is centered on the 1880 AT&SF steam locomotive and the impact of the railroad. *Changing Kansas* shares stories of people pushing to make their society a better place.

There are interactives throughout the gallery to enable you to explore some of these stories in more depth, to bring artifacts to life, and to make you feel more connected to the past.

The thematic structure allows us to update the exhibits, making it a more dynamic space. We have included special touches like this mural by Stan Herd.

As you leave the gallery, we will ask you one final question: What is the Future of Kansas? History holds lessons for us that we can use to better understand who we are and to help us take positive action in shaping our future.

Thank you for your patience and support. We cannot wait to share our new gallery with you.

**Save the Date:
Museum Reopening
November 22!**



Staff Spotlight: Mia Santarelli



Mia Santarelli is the tour and volunteer coordinator at the Historical Society's Kansas Museum of History. After moving from southeast Wisconsin to begin her college journey, she very quickly felt at home in Kansas. In 2017, Mia earned her bachelor's degree in Italian language studies from the University of Kansas, and followed her curiosity about history to Savannah, Georgia, where she completed her master's degree in art history. She focused her studies on photography and its development as a tool used to capture the multifaceted nuances of a single moment. Studying photographers such as Gordon Parks, Piergiorgio Branzi, and Robert Frank inspired Mia to continue exploring history through the lens of photography. Being part of a museum team, Mia says, is a dream come true. She truly believes the role of tour and volunteer coordinator is the perfect convergence of two things that bring her joy—helping others and sharing the history that makes Kansas so unique. She is eager to serve this organization and surrounding communities through creating meaningful connections with those around her, while continuing to foster a welcoming environment for visitors and colleagues.



Call to Volunteers: Join us in Sharing Your Stories, Our History

Kansas Historical Society volunteers play a vital role in preserving and sharing the unique stories that make up the history of Kansas. Your contribution as a volunteer can make a lasting impact on future generations, ensuring that the rich and complex history of the state continues to be shared. Many volunteer opportunities are available at the Kansas Historical Society—working alongside archeologists, assisting with archival projects, serving as a museum docent, and more. Join our team and help bring the fascinating history of Kansas to life for visitors from near and far!

Ready to take the next step? Contact Mia Santarelli, mia.santarelli@ks.gov; 785-272-8581, ext. 415; tour and volunteer coordinator for more details about how to get involved!



Celebrating KANSAS!

The Kansas Museum of History partnered with KANSAS! magazine in honor of the publication's 80th anniversary for our first special exhibit in the renovated gallery. *Celebrating KANSAS!* features stories and images from across the state and is organized into the six tourism regions of Kansas, with an additional section highlighting stories that cover the entire state. A timeline of the magazine takes visitors from 1945 when it launched as *To the Stars* through its most recent issues under current editor Andrea Etzel.

The exhibit was a true collaboration between KANSAS! magazine and the Kansas Historical Society. Andrea was our guest curator for the exhibit, writing the script and helping to select images. Exhibits staff members Anne Dorcay and Nate Forsberg designed, fabricated, and installed the exhibit panels. Collections staff members Matt Renick and Nikaela Zimmerman selected artifacts to display. Archives staff members Lisa Keys and Jennifer Thompson scanned more than 300 images to go into the exhibit.

We are thrilled to showcase these stories of Kansas and the magazine as the museum's first special exhibit since closing in 2022. This is a perfect pairing with the new gallery, and we hope it inspires you to get out and explore our beautiful state!

