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# Presenting the Past: Exhibits, 1877-1984

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Lucinda Simmons Bray

TO the casual visitor, who usually sees only visual presentations of artifacts through displays and exhibits, a museum does not appear to be a complicated institution. In truth, a museum is an ever-changing place where collections, staff, facilities, exhibits, and patrons are elements which differ over time.

The museum of the Kansas State Historical Society has grown and developed through the past one hundred years. Formerly it was located in two other then-new facilities, each serving the needs of a different era. The museum was begun during the formative years of the Historical Society, which was founded in 1875 and housed in the Kansas statehouse, then under construction. These quarters soon became overcrowded, and in 1914 the museum, along with other Society departments, was relocated in the new Memorial Building, where it developed into a mature collection of Kansas history.<sup>1</sup> Throughout these periods of growth the nature of the museum exhibits changed and evolved as well.

### In the Capitol

In the earliest decades only three functions were considered essential in a museum. Items were collected, arranged so they could be seen, and kept clean for public viewing. Visitors to the Kansas State Historical Society Museum in the late nineteenth century followed green painted signs from other state offices to the basement of the Capitol building's west wing, where "the snakes and wax apples are duly admired," said one Topeka newspaper correspondent. Franklin G. Adams, the first secretary of the Historical Society, gave tours of the cramped rooms, where the artifacts were crowded among stacks of books, newspapers,

and manuscripts. Along with portraits of pioneers they competed for valuable space but received due attention from the dedicated secretary. One visitor noted in 1881 that Adams "is the keeper of the shrine of the early Kansas saints, and he never plays any trick on reverent and unsuspecting visitors. When he brings out a rusty pike or time worn horse pistol, it can be relied on as the genuine thing."<sup>2</sup>

Franklin Adams, himself a pioneer Kansan, was described by one reporter as a "fresh 'fossil'" amidst "a regular curiosity shop for relics." For many the cluttered Historical Society rooms were a place of wonder and discovery, but only those fortunate enough to receive a personal tour were allowed the pleasure, through the artifacts, of seeing Adams "tearing down the veil of years that separates us from the past."<sup>3</sup>

By 1890, in fact, the rooms were so crowded that one visitor commenting on the displays said it was "hard to tell what they contain. There are flags and arms... and swords dimmed with blood and dented with blows... an old candle box, its bottom covered with a record which cannot be readily made out in the dim light."<sup>4</sup>

Three years later the Historical Society went beyond its immediate walls with what might be termed the first traveling exhibit. Beginning in 1892 plans were laid for a special display at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. It consisted primarily of framed portraits and books, although Topeka artist Henry Worrall had designed

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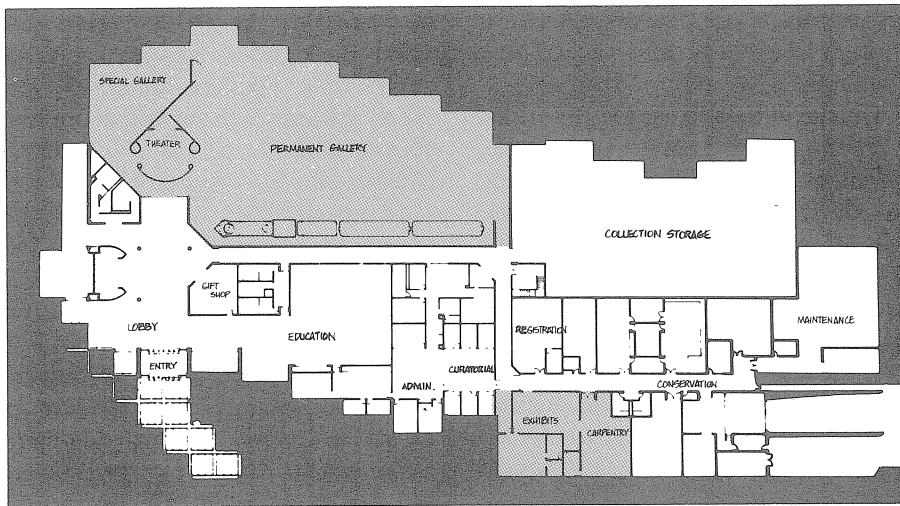
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1. Edgar Langsdorf, "The First Hundred Years of the Kansas State Historical Society," *KHQ* 41 (Autumn 1975):265-414.

2. *Topeka Daily Democrat*, December 8, 1881; *Atchison Daily Champion*, December 21, 1881.

3. *Topeka Daily Capital*, October 29, 1884; *Daily Commonwealth*, Topeka, September 3, 1884.

4. *Saturday Evening Lance*, Topeka, February 6, 1886; *Kansas City Star*, January 8, 1890.



grain decorations to represent the agricultural products of Kansas. When the exposition was over this exhibit was placed in the south wing of the statehouse. There it was enjoyed by visitors, including hordes of rats, which ate so much of the display that it had to be removed within a few years.<sup>5</sup>

Thus it was that at the turn of the century the Kansas State Historical Society Museum was presented as a crowded arrangement of curiosities which required explanation from the staff to give the meaning of each item to visitors. Children and adults were encouraged to be quiet during their visits to the revered objects of Kansas' past. In most respects the museum exhibits were truly "a hopeless, chaotic mass," as a *Topeka Daily Capital* reporter termed them. Indeed, on the evening of January 4, 1898, the overcrowded upper gallery of the museum collapsed, scattering books, pictures, and relics onto the tables and cases of the first level.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, in 1901 the Historical Society was able to occupy the entire fourth floor of the south wing of the statehouse. By August of that year shelving and new cases were being installed, and soon a portrait gallery of famous Kansans and rows of oak cases supported by scrolled cast-iron legs filled the walls and halls of that wing. Virtually all of the collection was shown. The pictures were arranged through the courtesy of Topeka artist George M. Stone, and "the guns, flags and banners properly displayed, and, in several handsome new showcases, the relics and curios have become objects of interest

5. *Eighth Biennial Report, 1890-1892*, 11, 14, 22; *Topeka Daily Capital*, September 30, 1892; *Ninth Biennial Report, 1892-1894*, 22; George A. Root, "Reminiscences of 50 Years on the State Historical Society Staff," George Allen Root Collection, Manuscripts Department, Kansas State Historical Society.

6. Root, "Reminiscences of 50 Years"; *Topeka Daily Capital*, September 25, 1898, January 5, 1898.



to hundreds of daily visitors." The new displays were well accepted, although there was some complaint that not enough women were represented in the portrait gallery.<sup>7</sup> In 1905 the adjutant general's collection of Civil War flags and banners was turned over to the Historical Society, and appropriations for a special glass-and-steel case enabled the staff to create a new display. This exhibit consisted of rows of flags labeled with the areas where the regiments served and the locations and dates of the battles in which they fought.<sup>8</sup>

For the next ten years the museum was an integral part of the statehouse. Visitors wandered along the rows of comparatively spacious but seemingly crowded cases. Here, as the collection grew, the Capitol seemed to become smaller.

### The Memorial Building

Years of hoping and planning finally resulted in the dedication of the Memorial Building in 1914. Society Secretary William E. Connelley had high hopes for the development of the museum in the new building. "It is generally conceded that the museum is one of the most attractive, interesting and instructive institutions of modern civilization,"

7. *Topeka Daily Capital*, March 28, 1901, August 18, 1901; *Kansas City Times*, October 9, 1903; *Thirteenth Biennial Report, 1900-1902*, 11; *Fifteenth Biennial Report, 1904-1906*, 31. KSHS museum exhibits at this time partially reflected museum thought of the nineteenth century; see George Brown Goode, "Museum-History and Museums of History," *Annual Report of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution, Report of the U.S. National Museum*, part 2 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1901), 65-81.

8. *Topeka Daily Capital*, July 19, 1905; *Fifteenth Biennial Report, 1904-1906*, 31.

he wrote in the 1912-14 biennial report. "Money, Civil War relics, ancient weapons, old and crude agricultural implements are compared with those of later years and show the progress of the people. . . . Properly exhibited these will make a display full of interest and instructive."<sup>9</sup>

Connelley expected to install exhibits on the fourth floor of the Memorial Building. To be called "Spinning Wheel Hall," the fourth floor was decorated with pictures by August 1914 while most of the relics awaited the purchase of new cases (the old, worn-out display cases had been left in the Capitol). In the meantime, artist George Stone and Charles Glead, a longtime board member who later served as president (1917), worked to install portraits in the first-floor lobby. "They are doing a very artistic job and are in some degree fixing the relative historical value and rank of characters in Kansas history," commented a Topeka reporter. At the same time the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) was occupying rooms on the second floor, where its display of Civil War pictures was set up with the help of Historical Society staff. Also as a joint venture, in 1914 the GAR ceremoniously marched the battle flags from the statehouse to the Memorial Building, where they were installed in five bronze-and-glass cases in the GAR Hall. Constructed by the Steel Fixture Manufacturing Company of Topeka, the cases were delivered in 1916; under a separate contract a patriotic sculpture of a spread eagle by Topeka artist Andrew Boell was attached to the top of each case.<sup>10</sup>

Other contracts, signed in 1915, provided twenty-eight badly needed display cases for the fourth

9. *Nineteenth Biennial Report, 1912-1914*, 75-76.

*In the Memorial Building, much of the collection was on view in marble-based oak cases.*



floor. That same year the bird collection of Nathaniel Stickney Goss was moved to the east rooms on the fourth floor, and for a short time the Kansas Academy of Science kept mineral displays in the west rooms. J. T. Genn of Wamego donated his collection of intricately detailed scrollwork and also built a display case to hold the collection. The Society could now boast that "more relics have been on display since we received these cases than ever before at any one time. The character of these relics makes them instructive and interesting to the public. Some people spend days studying the contents of these cases. More relics should be displayed, but they can not be placed in public view until we receive additional cases."<sup>11</sup>

This continual striving for more cases was a hallmark of museum display work for the next several decades. It was the desire of the Society to show, if possible, all the artifacts in the collection. Under the guidance of museum curator Edith Smelser, who served for thirty-seven years until her death in 1952, this goal was kept in mind as the displays were arranged. Relics related to famous people were grouped together. Collections from a single donor were displayed as a unit, although some thematic arrangements were made. Indian materials were generally found in one area, for example, and Civil War items were located together.<sup>12</sup>

As the Kansas State Historical Society approached its fiftieth anniversary in 1925 the call for more new cases was repeated frequently. Objects on loan were being returned to their owners and duplicates were being put in storage to make room for other artifacts. Finally, appropriations were received to purchase more cases. In preparation for the fiftieth anniversary meeting, Edith Smelser and other staff members worked overtime to fill the new, marble-based, oak cases. Several archeology collections were unpacked, inventoried, and installed with display cards for each item. New collections of china, items from the Red Cross, and a variety of other new treasures were set out as the crew worked many evenings for almost a month. The results were hailed as a major step

forward, for much of the collection was now on display.<sup>13</sup>

From the 1920s on, however, other problems had to be faced. The roof of the Memorial Building leaked, and consequently there was a periodic need to repaint the galleries and clean the cases. This usually included replacing the hand-lettered and typed labels used to identify most objects and their donors. Often specimens in the Goss bird collection needed to be repaired. Major cleanings of the museum took place in 1923, 1925, 1931, 1932, 1935 through 1938, 1947, and 1948. On several occasions such cleaning required the closing of the museum for two weeks to two months.<sup>14</sup>

If the depression years reduced both donations and visitation, they also brought unexpected help from various federal work projects. Between 1935 and 1943 assistants helped to redo the exhibits. Ultimately, one of the most innovative exhibit techniques also came from the federal projects. In 1938 it was announced that the Works Progress Administration (WPA) would support the construction of six dioramas for the museum. These would be "five feet wide and will exhibit in three dimensions six outstanding scenes in Kansas history. This will be one of the most interesting exhibits in the museum." Only two of these large dioramas were completed, one showing John Brown in a cabin scene and the other presenting Jotham Meeker working at his printing press. Finally, in 1943, a set of fourteen small-scale dioramas, produced by the Kansas WPA Museums Project, was provided for the museum. A variety of miniature scenes were sculpted in plaster and painted, including a buffalo hunt, Indian dances, Coronado's expedition, dinosaurs, and fur trapping. Representing a new exhibit technique, these dioramas remained on view in the east rooms of the museum for many

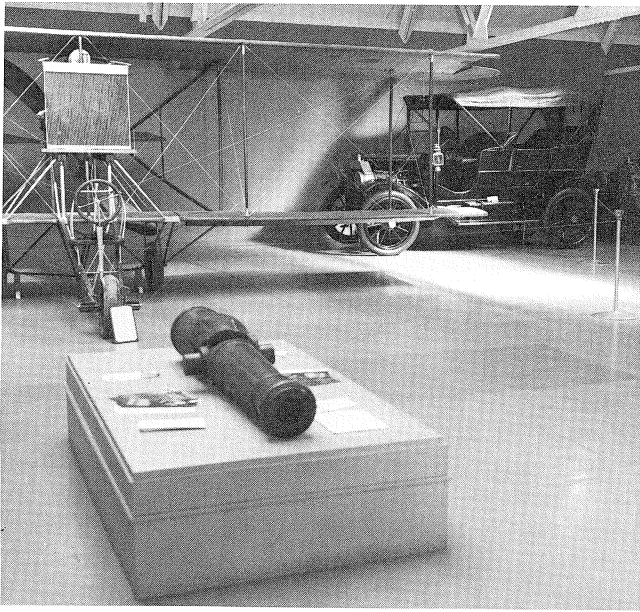
13. *Twenty-fifth Biennial Report, 1924-1925*, 24-25; Root, "Reminiscences of 50 Years."

14. *Twenty-fourth Biennial Report, 1922-1924*, 53; *Topeka Daily Capital*, January 24, 1932, February 3, 1948; "The Annual Meeting," *KHQ* 1 (February 1932):170; "The Annual Meeting," *KHQ* 2 (February 1933):75-76; "The Annual Meeting," *KHQ* 5 (February 1936):59-60; "The Annual Meeting," *KHQ* 6 (February 1937):83; "The Annual Meeting," *KHQ* 7 (February 1938):88. The museum's exhibits actually changed very little in the two decades prior to 1950. By the mid-1930s, however, members of the museum profession were becoming more critical of portrait galleries and the simple presentation of rows of artifacts in glass cases. See, for example, Arthur C. Parker, *A Manual for History Museums* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935), 55-67 and Lawrence Vail Coleman, *Manual for Small Museums* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1927), 131-35.

10. *Topeka Daily Capital*, August 23, 1914, December 7, 1915, December 17, 1915, May 14, 1916; *Topeka State Journal*, May 27, 1914; *Twentieth Biennial Report, 1914-1916*, 59; Root, "Reminiscences of 50 Years."

11. *Twenty-fifth Biennial Report, 1924-1925*, 25; *Twentieth Biennial Report, 1914-1916*, 9-10, 16, 55; *Twenty-first Biennial Report, 1917-1919*, 7. Regarding the Goss bird collection, see Michael J. Brodhead, "Nathaniel Stickney Goss: Kansas' Peripatetic Naturalist," *The Prairie Scout* (Abilene: Kansas Corral of the Westerners, 1974), 2:47-72.

12. *Twentieth Biennial Report, 1914-1916*, 20.



THE TRANSPORTATION AREA IN THE MAIN GALLERY



ABOVE, THE 1860S BEDROOM, BELOW, THE ONE-ROOM SCHOOLHOUSE



years. Two were still on exhibit when the museum was closed in 1983.<sup>15</sup>

By the middle of the twentieth century the Kansas State Historical Society Museum was a familiar part of the capital city. New exhibits, which often focused on a single artifact such as the Billard airplane or the stagecoach, attracted numerous visitors. Special displays of war souvenirs drew in thousands of servicemen and their families during the 1940s. Artifacts were suspended from the rafters stretching across the central gallery ceiling, and the cases still housed “relics” of the famous and infamous—Carry Nation’s ax, John Brown’s gun, and a piece of paper stained with Abraham Lincoln’s blood. It was clear, however, that the rapidly growing visiting public would demand change. That change came when Nyle H. Miller became the secretary of the Society in 1951.

In 1952, following Edith Smelser’s death, Charles “Bud” Holman became director of the museum, and Joan Foth was appointed assistant museum director. Within a year the galleries were undergoing rapid change reflecting a different exhibit philosophy. Now exhibits were to be placed in historical sequence, with the artifacts arranged and labeled to represent “a chapter of a book.” Rather than consisting of cases brimming with objects, the new exhibits were to feature a few related artifacts and labeling to tell a story. Visitors would see fewer objects but could learn more about Kansas history and the significance of particular artifacts. “By putting two or three objects in a case,” said Joan Foth, “people suddenly see an object for the first time.”<sup>16</sup>

Under Holman, major thematic exhibit sections were created within the galleries. Materials relating to Indians, trappers, and natural history were exhibited in the east wing. In the main gallery, the Longren airplane, high-wheeled bicycles, and two automobiles—a Thomas Flyer and a Great Smith—formed a transportation area backed by a wall painted “Pompeian red, a soft tomato shade.” Cases were arranged by topical themes such as the territorial period and “famous Kansans.” Zula Bennington Greene, a reporter for the *Topeka Daily Capital*, found the overall effect impressive. “The new arrangement is orderly and spacious. It entices

15. “The Annual Meeting,” *KHQ* 8 (February 1939):67; *Kansas Labor Weekly*, Topeka, January 18, 1945; *Topeka Daily Capital*, September 17, 1944; Kansas Museum Project, *Catalog of Visual Aids and Handicrafts* (Topeka: Work Projects Administration, Professional and Service Division, 1940).

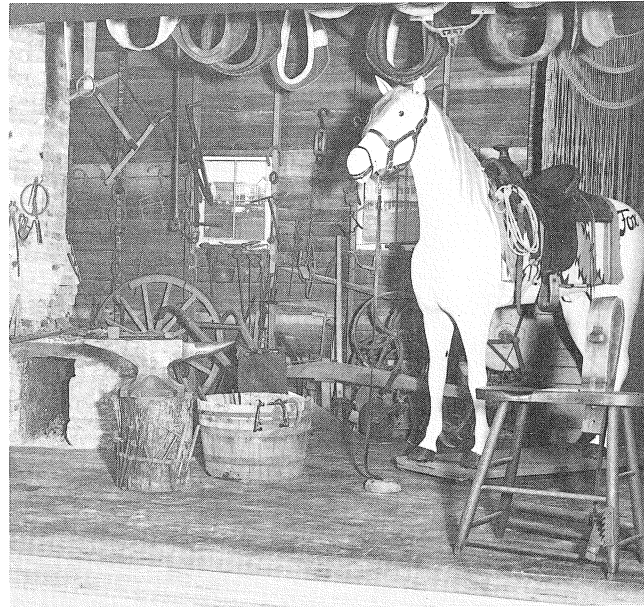
16. *Topeka Daily Capital*, January 30, 1954.

the visitor instead of discouraging him with too much," she wrote. "As one walks through the middle arch to the main gallery, he is instantly struck by a feeling of spaciousness and drama. It is not just a room with a lot of stuff in it. It is a room as well planned as a painting."<sup>17</sup>

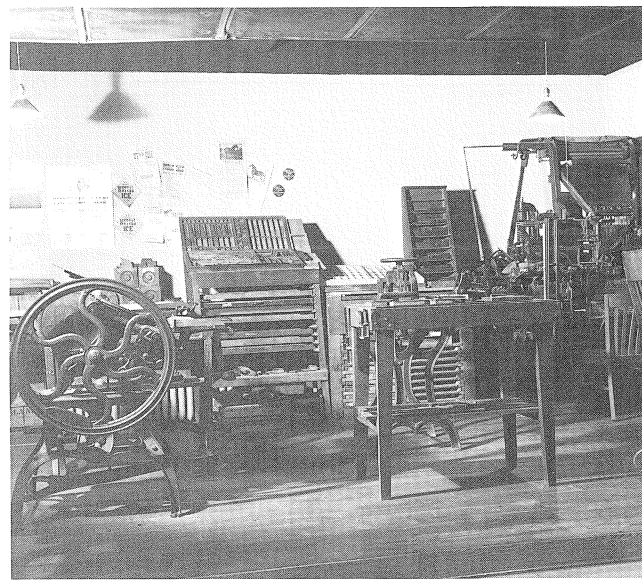
Believing that artifacts not endangered by handling should be placed on open display, Holman made accessible to touch a ball and chain, Indian grinding stones, and the cannon "Old Kickapoo." The cannon was situated in the main gallery "occupying the place of honor under the big skylight." It was exhibited on a pink base, "an echo of the Pompeian wall"<sup>18</sup>

In Holman's brief stint as museum director, plans were formulated for the development of "period rooms" representing Kansas homes from territorial times through the Victorian era. Also planned was a 1900-1910 workroom to show weaving, churning, sewing, and other domestic activities. The first period room opened in 1955 after Holman had left and been succeeded by Stanley Sohl as museum director. The 1860s bedroom was "the first of a series... completed in an effort to show early-day living conditions." Sohl supervised the development of nearly a dozen period rooms from 1955 to 1962. The March 1955 issue of the Society's *Mirror* noted the expectations about this exhibit technique: "These period rooms are likely to become the most exciting and educational features in the museum and the staff would like to start now to gather material which will give an accurate picture of the Kansas of our grandparents."<sup>19</sup>

To acquire appropriate artifacts for the period rooms, an active solicitation campaign was begun. In part, because of this campaign, the west wing of the fourth floor ultimately housed, in addition to the 1860s bedroom, a sod-house interior, a Victorian parlor, a 1900 one-room schoolhouse, a kitchen of the early 1900s, and a 1920s parlor. The commercial life of a small town was represented through period rooms constructed in the east wing. A doctor's office, a dentist's office, a blacksmith-harness shop,



THE BLACKSMITH-HARNESS SHOP



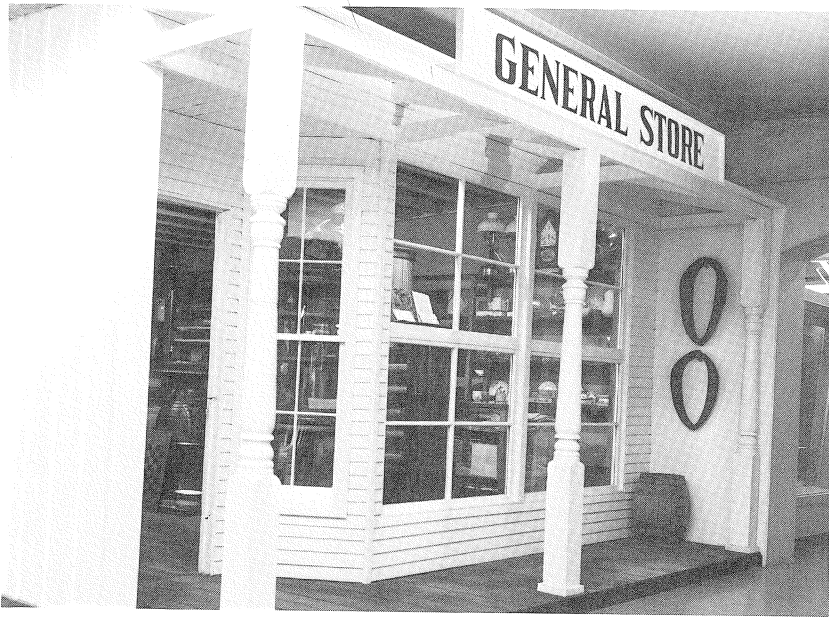
ABOVE, THE PRINT SHOP. BELOW, THE DENTIST'S OFFICE



17. *Topeka Daily Capital*, July 18, 1954.

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Topeka State Journal*, May 3, 1955; "New Museum Program Is Now Underway," *Mirror* 1 (March 1955). The period-room exhibit technique has been used since the 1850s in Europe, and since 1907 in the United States. Period rooms are generally popular, but they have been criticized in part for requiring much space and not allowing the observer to inspect the artifacts closely. See Edward P. Alexander, *Museums in Motion* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1979), 87 and "Artistic and Historical Period Rooms," *Curator* 7 (December 1964):263-81.



THE GENERAL STORE



THE COUNTRY DOCTOR'S OFFICE



ABOVE, THE EARLY 1900S FARM KITCHEN, BELOW, THE SOD-HOUSE INTERIOR



a printing shop, and a general store completed the museum's "Main Street."

While period rooms were constructed in the east and west wings, the central gallery also underwent considerable change. Twenty new cases were received in 1956, and the staff began installing exhibits that would "trace Kansas history from prehistoric times to the development of early industries." Unlike the horizontal glass units that preceded them, the new cases were built to stand upright and to accommodate three-dimensional exhibits combining artifacts with labels and graphics. The use of specially designed cases was considered "state-of-the-art" museum exhibit technique.

In 1956 a number of exhibits on the early history of Kansas were completed. Among the exhibit topics were the "path of early man's migration to the Great Plains," the Louisiana Purchase and early explorers, first territorial governor Andrew Reeder, and early missions in Kansas. The WPA dioramas were refurbished, and loaned materials relating to Dwight D. Eisenhower were exhibited. Seasonal displays for the first-floor lobby included a Christmas tree with antique toys and an exhibit featuring Easter bonnets. Other changing lobby exhibits included two cases on photography and a display of "Grandma's Gadgets," which "certainly proved that the housewife of today is not the only one to have a wide assortment of gadgets at her disposal."<sup>20</sup>

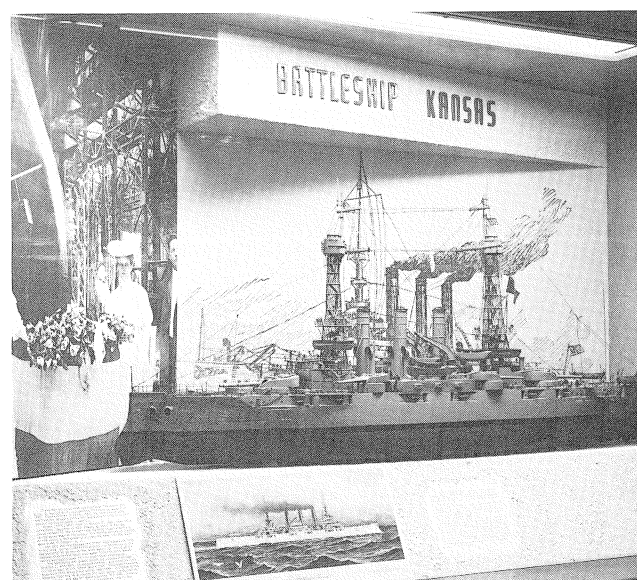
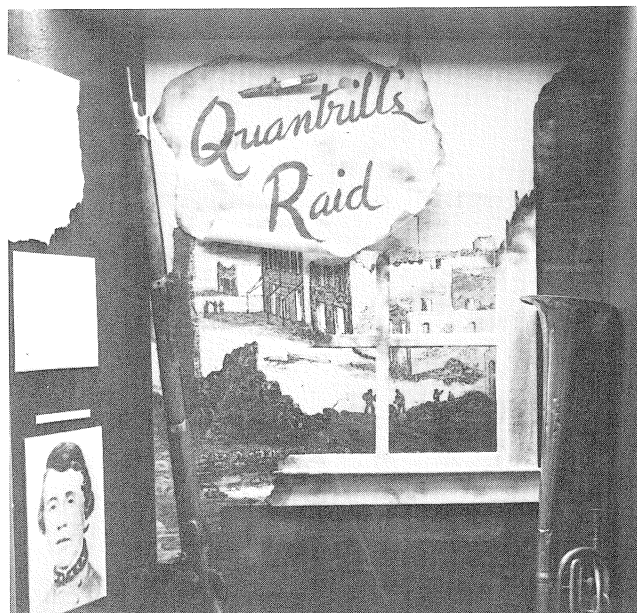
Another twenty cases were installed in 1957. These were devoted to "specific events or fields rather than to chronological sequence of general

historical areas." "Famous Guns," the " Battleship Kansas," "Tools of Pioneer Women," "Quantrill's Raid," and "Victorian Elegance" were among the first such exhibit subjects. Special effort also was directed toward revising the Indian section. Exhibits were designed to interpret the culture of the Indian tribes that settled in Kansas.<sup>21</sup>

Twenty additional cases were acquired in 1958 and were developed as in 1957. By September, exhibit development had progressed to the point that the *Mirror* reported, "For the first time the Society's museum now has an entire section devoted to the American Indian and the displays have already proved popular with both adults and children." Souvenir plates and dishes of Kansas and lighting devices were displayed in the "Collector's Corner." This space in the galleries was used from 1958 until 1983 by exhibits designed to "appeal particularly to antique collectors and hobbyists." Among the types of artifacts exhibited were irons, early wooden instruments, mechanical kitchen gadgets, unusual cups, and postage stamps. When the fourth-floor galleries were closed in 1983, the area displayed collections of razors, horseshoes, nineteenth-century family albums, and tobacco paraphernalia.<sup>22</sup>

Exhibits also were placed in the third-floor lobby in 1958. Most were of the type in the "Collector's Corner"; several were rotated from display there. A year later, due to a pressing shortage of space, the museum began to make the old counter-type cases available to local historical societies. Mannequins were acquired "to lend greater realism to the period rooms."<sup>23</sup>

Financed in large part through a donation from the Woman's Kansas Day Club, the Victorian parlor was opened to public view in July 1960. This room demonstrated the wealth of the period and incorporated a fireplace from the razed governor's mansion. Also in 1960, additional space was made available by the remodeling of the Memorial Building, and three new galleries were developed for opening during the state's centennial year. A "military



BELOW. THE VICTORIAN PARLOR



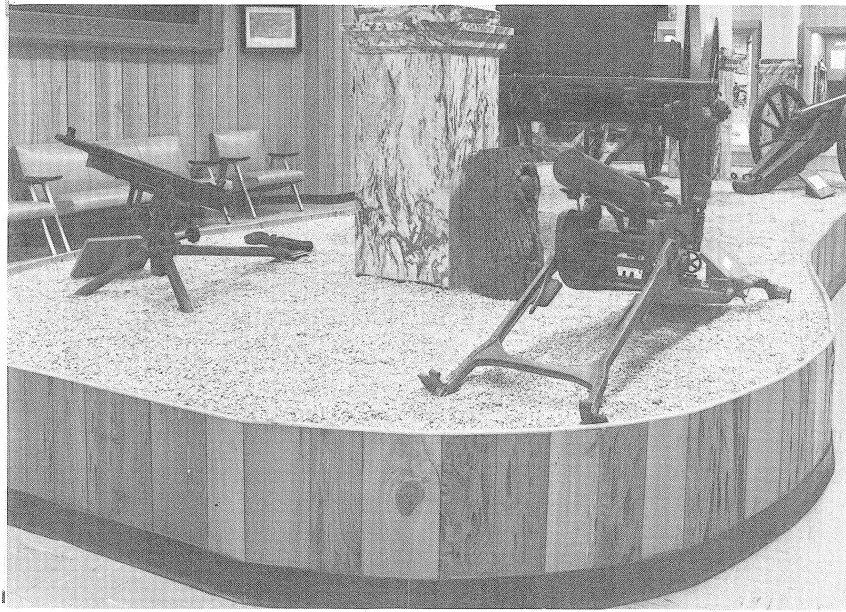
20. "New Display Cases and Christmas Decorations Featured by Museum," *Mirror* 2 (January 1956); "New Displays in '3-D' Are Museum Highlights," *Mirror* 2 (March 1956). For case exhibit technique see Arminta Neal, *Help! for the Small Museum* (Boulder: Pruett Publishing Co., 1969).

21. "More Help Needed by Museum as New Program Moves Ahead," *Mirror* 3 (January 1957).

22. "Museum's Indian Gallery Has Reached Completion," *Mirror* 4 (September 1958); "Newly Installed Exhibits and Recent Gifts Make Museum News," *Mirror* 4 (July 1958).

23. "Recent Accessions and High Attendance Make Museum News," *Mirror* 5 (July 1959).





THE MILITARY GALLERY



ABOVE, THE AGRICULTURAL GALLERY. BELOW, INDIAN EXHIBITS ON THE THIRD FLOOR



museum devoted to Kansas' representation in all wars" was created in space previously occupied by offices and displays of the GAR and associated organizations. A central feature of the military gallery was the display of large weapons, and exhibits traced military history from the frontier fort to the atomic age. Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower and other famous Kansas officers also were represented. An agricultural gallery featuring large pieces of farm equipment was built in reclaimed space as well. Case exhibits depicted such subjects as homesteading, the cattle industry, and the development of irrigation.<sup>24</sup>

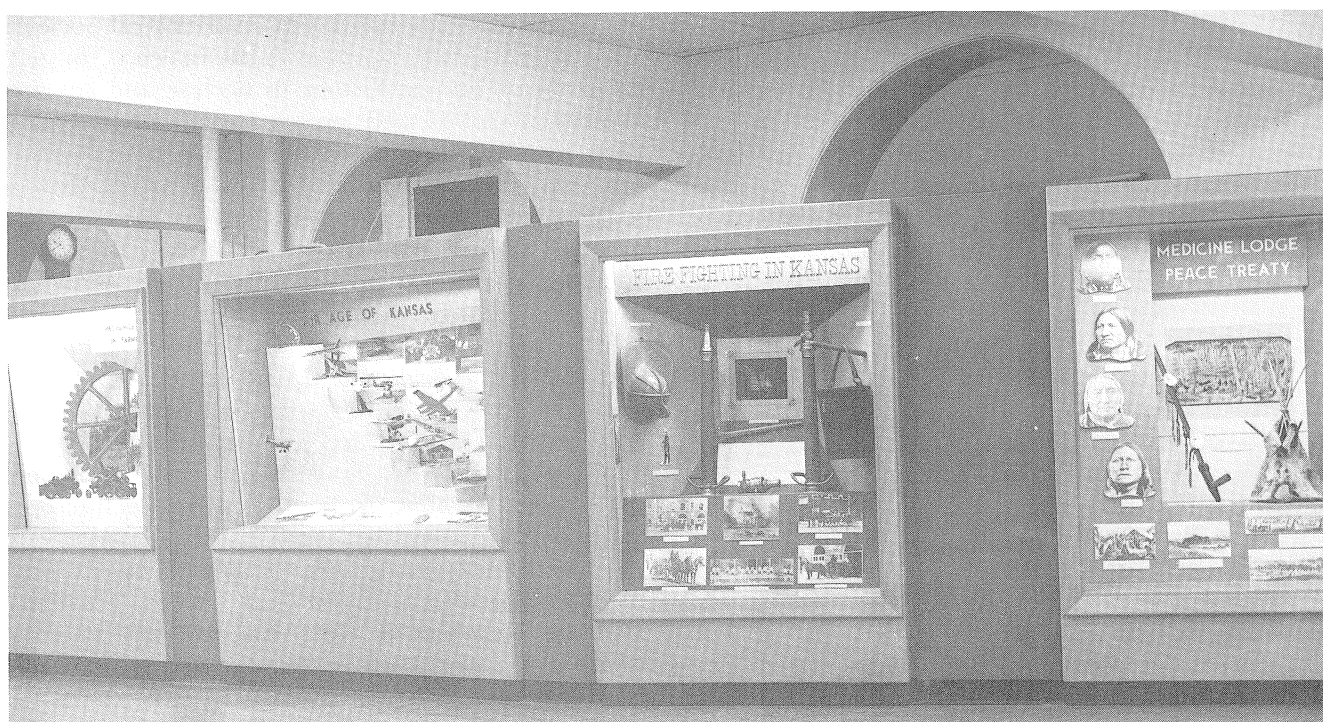
Exhibits focusing on American Indians from prehistoric to modern times were transferred from the fourth floor to a new gallery on the third floor. "With the displays, even the amateur can note the difference in the characteristics in the various tribes," commented a Topeka reporter. Space cleared on the fourth floor was then "devoted to the role of women in Kansas history and to clothing and household items of interest to feminine museum visitors." Ten exhibits were placed in this area during 1961. China, glassware, silver, hats, shoes, hobbies, toys, fans, and accessories were thought to be of particular interest to women; men and boys were expected to be inclined toward the military and agricultural galleries.<sup>25</sup>

Following the gallery reorganization of 1960 through 1961, considerable time was devoted to developing special and traveling exhibits. A centennial semitrailer truck was fitted with twenty-one display units for viewing across the state. Individual exhibits dealt with such subjects as forts, trails, Indians, government, agriculture, industry, schools, Indian missions, and the Civil War. The centennial exhibit installed in the main lobby of the Memorial Building featured the Wyandotte Constitution, U.S. and Kansas flags, the state seal, a Charles Robinson portrait, and a sketch of Lincoln raising a thirty-four-star flag. Minus the portrait of Robinson and the Lincoln sketch, the exhibit remains today in the first-floor lobby. The Chisholm Trail Centennial in 1967 also was commemorated with a traveling exhibit. Installed on a railroad car provided by the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway Company, the mobile exhibit was viewed in several states. A

24. "Remodeling of Memorial Building Almost Finished," *Mirror 7* (January 1961).

25. *Topeka Capital-Journal*, July 21, 1963; "Remodeling of Memorial Building Almost Finished," *Mirror 7* (January 1961).

26. "Traveling Exhibits Preparing to Roll," *Mirror 7* (May 1961); "The Annual Meeting," *KHQ 28* (Spring 1962):121-22;



EXHIBITS IN THE MAIN GALLERY ON THE FOURTH FLOOR

"Buy-Centennial" exhibit on the commercialization of the nation's birthday was displayed in 1976.<sup>26</sup>

For several years exhibits were sent to fairs and antique shows. One of the first was a general store period room fabricated for display at the Mid-America Fair in Topeka. From 1967 to 1981, exhibits were prepared regularly for the four display cases in the statehouse rotunda. More than eighty exhibits were installed in the Capitol during that period, over one-third of which were later placed in the Memorial Building museum galleries.<sup>27</sup>

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, museum exhibit personnel were actively involved in the interpretation of the historic sites administered as branch museums of the Kansas State Historical Society. At the Memorial Building, exhibits were

"Special Display Placed in Memorial Building," *Mirror* 8 (January 1962); "The Annual Meeting," *KHQ* 34 (Spring 1968):74; "The Annual Meeting," *KHQ* 43 (Spring 1977):90.

27. "The Annual Meeting," *KHQ* 28 (Spring 1962):121-22; "Society Places Exhibits in Statehouse Rotunda," *Mirror* 13 (January 1967); "New Exhibits Installed in Memorial Building and Capitol," *Mirror* 14 (November 1968); "Three New Case Displays Are in Capitol Rotunda," *Mirror* 16 (July 1970).

28. "Historical Properties to Receive Better Care," *Mirror* 7 (July 1961); *Kansas City Star*, March 9, 1966; "The Annual Meeting," *KHQ* 31 (Spring 1965):85. See also *Standing Rainbows: Railroad Promotion of Art, the West and Its Native People* (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society in association with the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway Co., 1981).

refurbished as needed, and new exhibits occasionally were installed as others were dismantled. Even with the transfer of the Goss bird collection to the University of Kansas Natural History Museum, however, the amount of space available for further exhibit development was severely restricted.

In later years greater emphasis was placed on temporary exhibits. Several major special exhibits were installed in the second-floor lobby. "Standing Rainbows: Railroad Promotion of Art, the West and Its Native People" was produced through the cooperation of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway in 1981, and scenes of Strawberry Hill by Kansas City artist Marijana Grisnik were exhibited later that year. Traveling exhibits from other institutions, such as the Smithsonian's "Blacks in the Westward Movement," also were shown.<sup>28</sup>

As preparations proceeded for moving into the new facility, exhibit work focused on installations to be placed in the new permanent galleries and special exhibit area. At the Memorial Building exhibit galleries were closed in stages as necessary for cataloging and packing the museum collections. At 5:00 P.M. on March 31, 1983, the main gallery was closed. In less than four hours, exhibits developed over the last twenty-five years were dismantled, leaving only memories and the experience gained in their creation.

### Kansas Museum of History

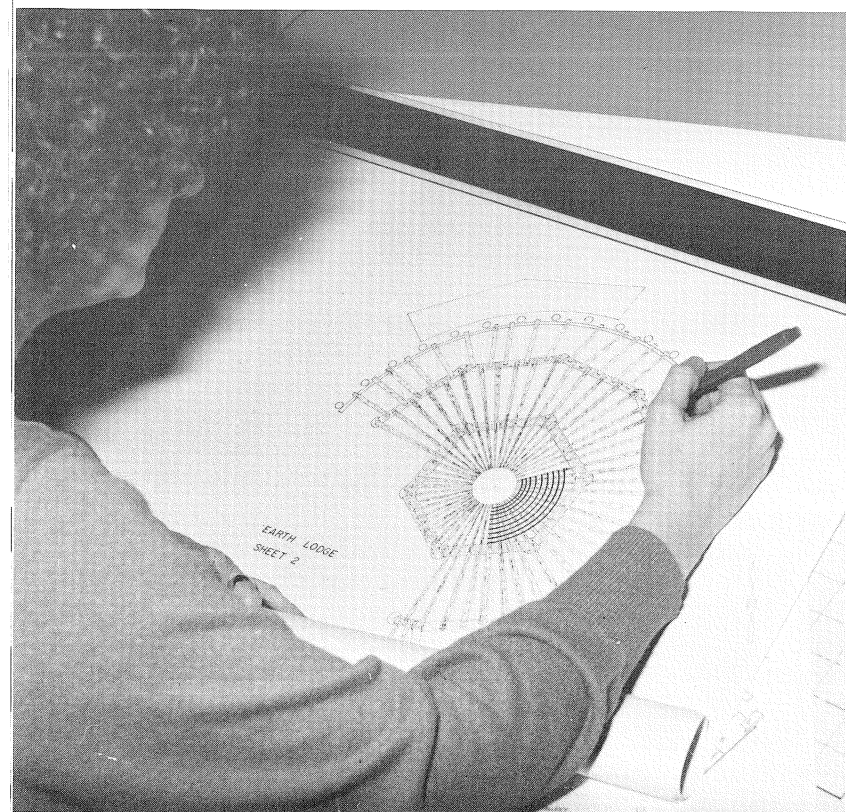
The Kansas Museum of History provides the Historical Society with the opportunity to expand its presentation of Kansas history. The new facility features a spacious exhibit gallery encompassing a three-thousand-square-foot special exhibit gallery, an orientation theater, and a nineteen-thousand-square-foot hall which will house the museum's main exhibit, "Voices from the Heartland: A Kansas Legacy." The special gallery will provide space for shows on loan from other institutions as well as short-term exhibits. Its twelve-foot ceiling clearance, carpeted walls, track lighting, and movable wall-panel system create a sophisticated environment in which to present exhibits complementing the museum's purpose. The main gallery, boasting a thirty-five-foot ceiling height and broad, uninterrupted floor space, will allow the full usage of artifacts of varying sizes and provide the opportunity for innovative exhibit construction.

Interpretive programming, the responsibility of the Exhibits, Education, and Research divisions of the Kansas Museum of History, encompasses

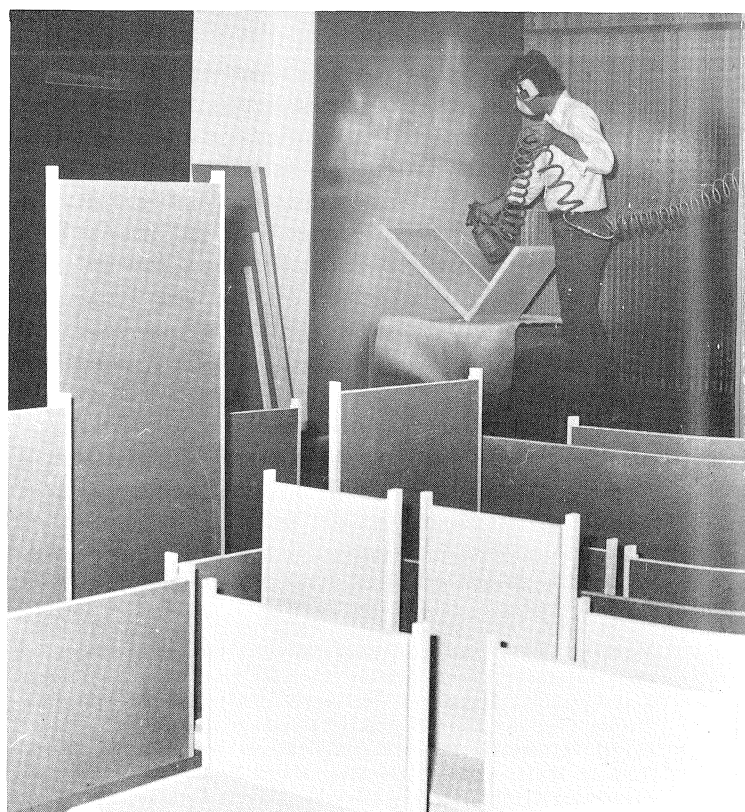
the objectives of the Kansas State Historical Society. Simply stated, the purpose is to interpret or tell the story of Kansas history in a clear and concise manner. Exhibits and programming are intended both to educate and to entertain visitors while providing them with an idea of how events occurring today affect events tomorrow, just as those which occurred yesterday affect our lives today. By understanding change and continuity, along with the interrelationship of humankind and the environment, visitors are able to think and to draw conclusions about the land called Kansas. Perhaps the most appropriate goal of interpretive programming is to cause the visitor to feel a part of history.

Making history live within the museum is no small task. Exhibits are planned so that the interpretation does not compromise the historical integrity of a subject, and consideration is given to protecting the physical well-being of each artifact. Exhibits also are designed to avoid limiting any visitor's access to the physical environment and its interpretive message.

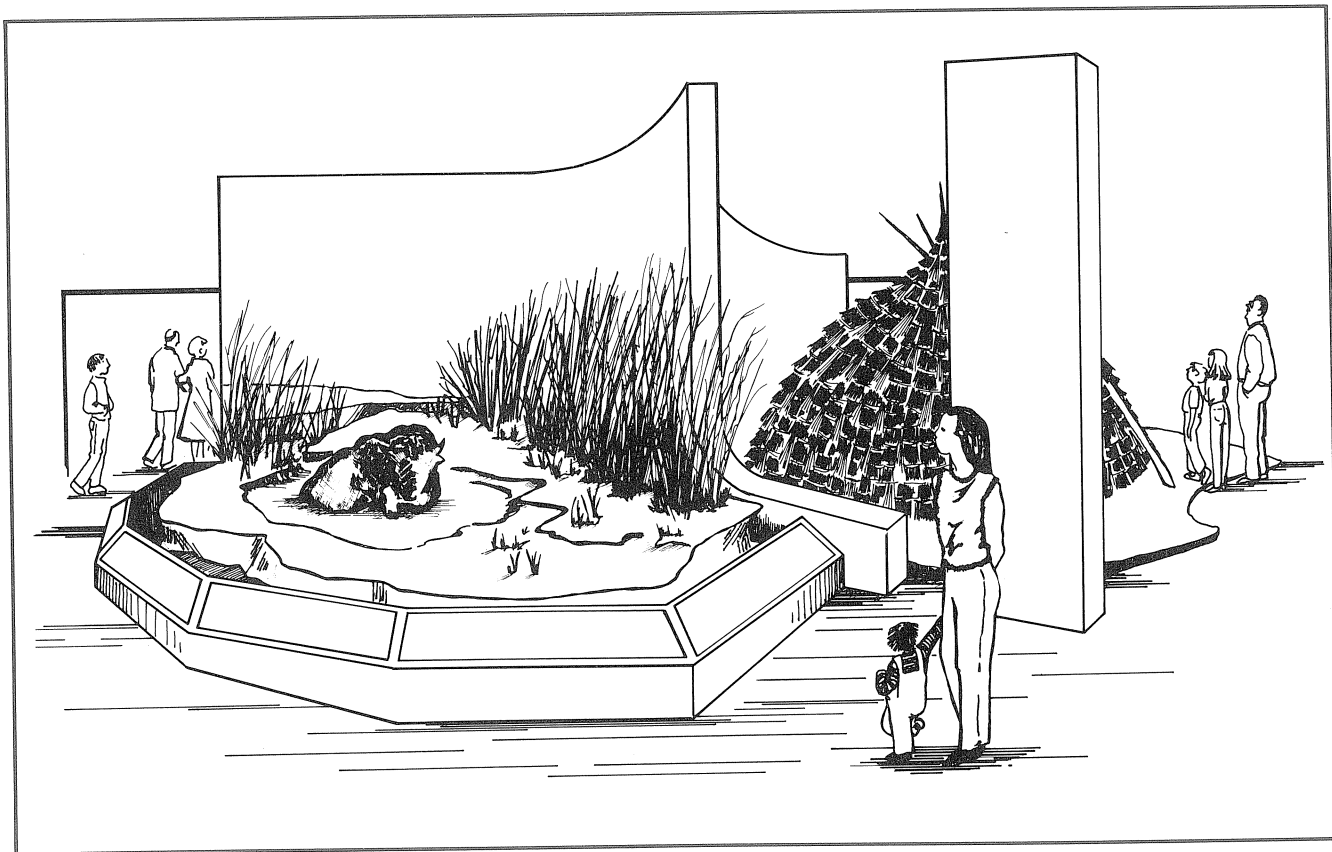
Moreover, exhibits are planned to complement



*Lucinda Bray, chief of exhibits, studies plans for the earth lodge that will be constructed.*



*A museum technician paints exhibit panels in the new spray booth.*



*Artifacts, illustrations, and innovative exhibit techniques will be combined to tell the story of Kansas people and the land they inhabited in "Voices from the Heartland."*

one another. Because the museum's central purpose is to convey information about Kansas and its surrounding region, the long-range exhibit plans include the development over the next three years of "Voices from the Heartland: A Kansas Legacy," the main exhibit on Kansas history. Located in the main gallery, this exhibit will trace the growth of Kansas from the earliest inhabitants through the years to the recent past. Interpretation in this hall centers upon three observable themes in human activity: how we feed and care for ourselves, how we interact with each other, and how we create our homes on the land. Throughout is woven information about the land and how we deal with it. This story will be illustrated by such items as a grass lodge of the Wichita, a prairie habitat, an emigrant's wagon, and the *Cyrus K. Holliday* train. Many artifacts will be blended together so that, joined with labels, graphics, and a pleasing environment, the story of Kansas and its people can be told.

Alongside "Voices from the Heartland," a regularly scheduled series of changing exhibits

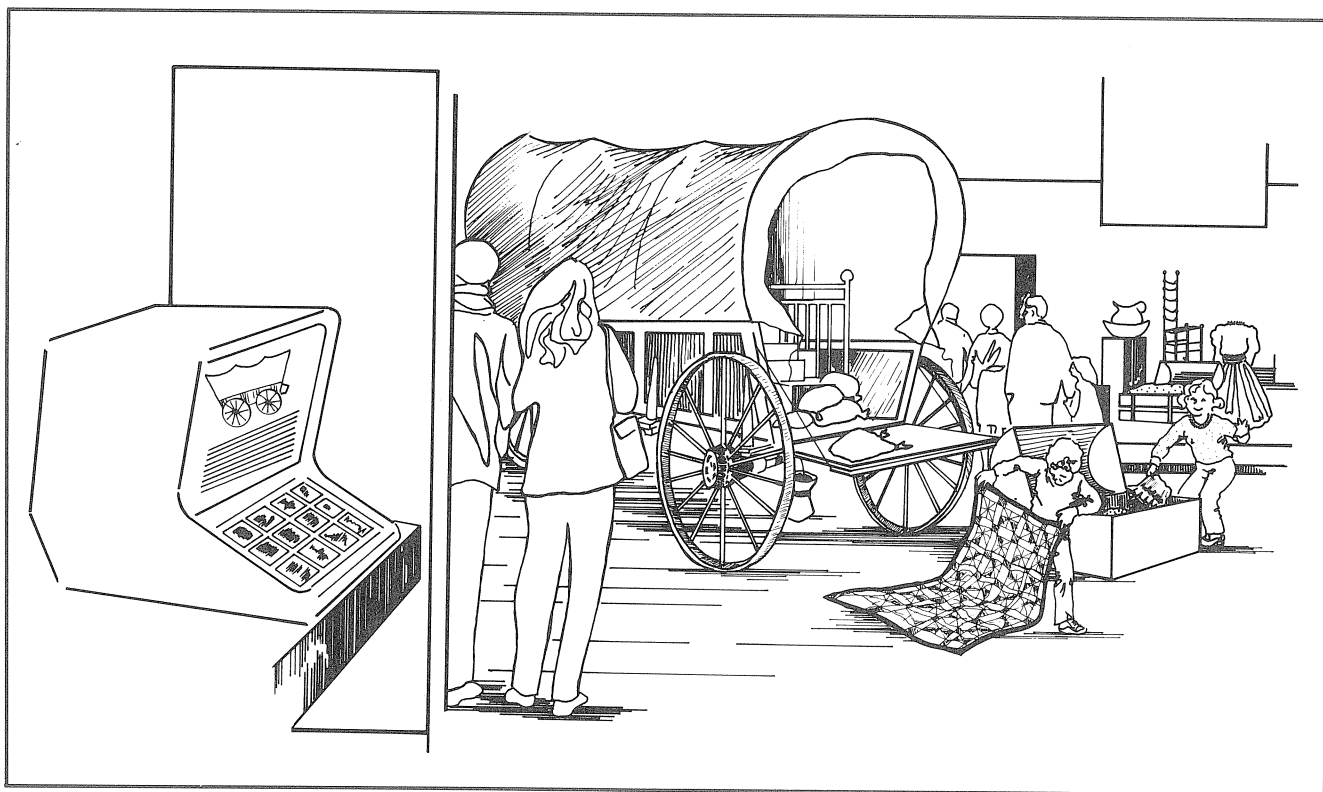
will be produced in the special exhibit gallery. These exhibits will expand upon ideas only briefly touched upon in "Voices," adding new dimensions and depth. Other exhibits will provide the opportunity to see material not available in the museum's collections. These loan exhibits as well as those originating within the Kansas Museum of History will be on display from four to six months each. The series begins in June of 1984 with the exhibit "Samples of Our Heritage" (see catalog elsewhere in this issue). It will be followed in the late fall by an exhibit of classic western art assembled from museum collections across the United States and by "Kansas Images" in the summer of 1985. "Images" will bring together material from the museum's collection and from other sources relating to the ways in which people have viewed or thought of "Kansas" through the years.

Another objective of the Kansas Museum of History is to make interpretive programming available to as many people as possible. For this reason the majority of the exhibits originating in the museum will include "mini-exhibits" intended for circulation

to schools, historical societies, and museums throughout the state. It is hoped that from this beginning a traveling exhibits program with a regional orientation will develop.

Many questions will be asked as the public becomes accustomed to the new building. Visitors will wonder where their favorite quilt or piece of silver is or be pleased when an "old friend" is encountered in its new setting. Changes are important to continuity, and with this third move for the

Society's museum, change will be evident. Gone will be the period rooms with their assemblages of furniture. In their places will appear vignettes of interiors and buildings. These smaller period settings will be historically accurate and will perhaps tell us more in an intimate way than did the larger rooms. Gone will be microcosms of history in closed cases. In their stead will be a flow of history with artifacts blending and tracing the threads of Kansas' past. KH



*Activity centers with participatory exhibits will be located throughout "Voices," enabling visitors to gain a personal understanding of Kansas history.*