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# Cannons, Spinning Wheels, and a Train: A History of the Museum Collection

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by Mary Ellen Hennessey Nottage

THE Kansas State Historical Society is approaching its eleventh decade of collecting. Its holdings, both written and artifactual, give evidence of the way Kansas became Kansas and Kansans became the Kansans of the 1980s. Within the collections are the thoughts, aspirations, and possessions of governors, of rebels, of pastors, of soldiers, of poets, of merchants, of farmers, of dressmakers, of mothers and fathers and children. Early in the state's history the citizens demonstrated a self-consciousness that manifested itself in a desire to document their collective lives. From this desire came the founding of the State Historical Society.

At its inception in 1875, the Society's founders gave to the new organization the purpose of "saving the present and past records of our twenty-one years of eventful history."<sup>1</sup> Four years later the Historical Society was recognized as the official trustee of the state's historical materials, and state law elaborated on the simple statement of purpose, requiring the organization:

To collect books, maps and other papers and materials illustrative of the history of Kansas in particular, and of the West generally; to procure from the early pioneers narratives of events relative to the early settlement of Kansas, and to the early explorations, Indian occupancy, and overland travel in the Territory and the West; to procure facts and statements relative to the history and conduct of our Indian tribes, and to gather all information calculated to exhibit faithfully the antiquities, and the past and present condition, resources and progress of the State; to purchase books to supply deficiencies in the various departments of its collections, and to procure by gift and exchange such scientific and historical reports . . . and such other books, maps, charts and materials as will facilitate the investigation of historical, scientific, social, educational and literary subjects. . . .<sup>2</sup>

The written word was to carry the history of the state. Little notice was given to collecting artifacts; in fact, the emphasis in the brief mention of "antiquities" in the statutes of 1879 was on the gathering of the verbal information to accompany their exhibition. The perception of the artifact in the early Historical Society was quite different from that of today. The artifacts that found their way into the collection were relegated to sideshow status. In early years, the museum collection in its entirety was placed in exhibit cases and on the walls in a manner now referred to as visible storage. It fit where it could among the library collections in the meager accommodations allowed the Historical Society in the statehouse. Use of the museum collection was a passive function on the part of the institution; the relics were there for those who chose to look them over. The board of directors was firm in its belief that no group of artifacts superseded in importance the library function of any historical society, collections and services included.<sup>3</sup> This attitude is well illustrated in the tabulations of acquisitions made periodically for the Historical Society's biennial reports. Between 1876 and 1900, the organization received 23,508 manuscripts, 23,051 books, 23,907 volumes of newspapers and magazines, 67,418 pamphlets, and 5,120 maps, atlases, and charts into its library proper. During this same period the museum of history received 5,326 pictures and 6,952 artifacts grouped and referred to as "relics, scrip, coin, etc."<sup>4</sup> Throughout its history, the Society maintained this statistical balance between written materials and artifacts, but the nature of the museum collection and the perception of its historical value underwent many changes.

Franklin G. Adams, the secretary of the Historical Society from 1876 to 1899, had dreams of making the institution a microcosm of the world. "Our museum," he wrote in 1878, "will contain objects illustrative of

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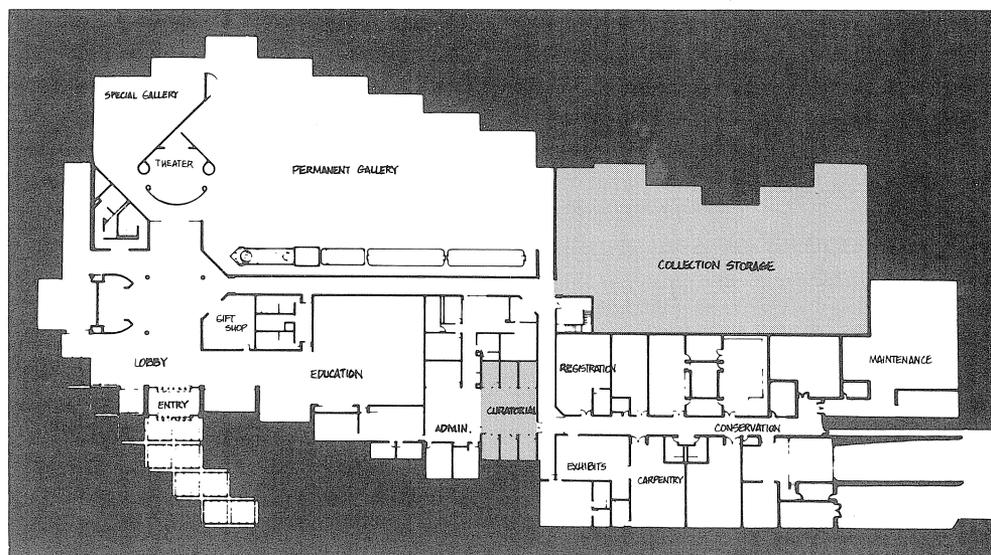
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1. Edgar Langsdorf, "The First Hundred Years of the Kansas State Historical Society," *KHQ* 41, (Autumn 1975):265, 268.

2. *Kansas Historical Collections, 1875-1881*, 1 and 2:56.

3. *Kansas Historical Collections, 1883-1885*, 3:16.

4. *Fifteenth Biennial Report, 1904-1906*, 11-12.



the civilization and the manners and customs of all people in all ages.”<sup>5</sup> The board of directors had more limited, and in retrospect much more practical, expectations of the museum. The report of the board submitted at the seventh annual meeting, held in January 1883, gives some insight into what types of objects the members considered suitable for acquisition. Acceptable were artifacts that illustrated “the modes of life of our pioneer settlers, their political struggles, and hardy experiences.” Also to be welcomed into the collection were war relics, portraits of citizens prominent in activities within Kansas, and “objects illustrating the history and manners and customs of the Indians or other inhabitants.”<sup>6</sup>

During its first fifty years the museum did well collecting within the latter categories, but many Kansans shared Secretary Adams’ wonder and curiosity about the world beyond the borders of their state. The acquisition of the twenty-seven-hundred-year-old piece of Egyptian linen was heralded with the same enthusiasm as the ballot box from the first election in Rawlins County.

The political struggles of pioneer settlers became a natural focal point for the Society’s early collecting activities. With the troubles of 1856 less than thirty years old and still freshly remembered, volumes of printed and written material on the subject of the free-state struggles poured into the Historical Society. There was a corresponding abundance of artifacts, including the keys to the Free State Hotel in Lawrence, which was burned down by a band of proslavery

raiders, and a piece of coarse graham meal bread made by Lawrence residents when their flour supplies were cut off by the activities of “border ruffians.” The cannon “Old Kickapoo,” one day aimed at free-state voters and a few days later captured by them, became a star attraction at the Historical Society.<sup>7</sup> The Society’s acquisition of the office table of the New England Emigrant Aid Company, an organization successful in sending antislavery settlers to Kansas, was seen as an important coup. “It already has a value that gold cannot measure, and as the years roll by its value will increase in a geometrical ratio until it will take its place among the sacred relics of a holy cause.”<sup>8</sup> The emotion that fired the “holy cause” and kept its memory vibrant affected and was affected by the collection of relics that grew in the rooms of the Historical Society.

Much of the same emotion was involved in the Society’s amassing of war relics during its first fifty years of operation. F. P. Baker, the organization’s president in 1884, spoke on “The Values and Uses of Historical Societies”:

More than one father in his proud sorrow has sent the sword of his soldier son to hang forever a memorial of his bravery. And thus we keep alive the spirit and the mute record of patriotism. In time grandsons and great-grandsons will come to look at these relics, and what is deemed silver will be gold then. We value what we have gathered, but it will be worth tenfold more to those who come after us.<sup>9</sup>

5. Quoted in Langsdorf, “The First Hundred Years,” 283.  
6. *Kansas Historical Collections, 1883-1885*, 3:16.

7. Langsdorf, “The First Hundred Years,” 285-87.  
8. *Daily Capital*, Topeka, March 19, 1881.  
9. *Daily Commonwealth*, Topeka, October 14, 1884.

Artifacts of the Civil War were prominent among acquisitions from the Historical Society's inception until the event was eclipsed by other wars in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For decades soldiers and their families sent in bits and pieces of ruined buildings, ammunition, and abandoned arms—all gleanings from battlefields where the "War of the Rebellion" was fought. Bullets removed from the limbs of Kansas soldiers testified to bravery. Engraved pistols and swords presented to officers by their men testified to honor. Hardtack testified to hardships endured. Captured rebel flags memorialized victory over armies. Countless pieces of Confederate scrip memorialized a vanquished society. The most publicized acquisition, however, was the collection of battle flags and guidons of Kansas regiments. The flags had been housed in the adjutant general's office, but some believed the Historical Society was a more appropriate place for them. After making proposals to preserve and exhibit them in glass cases, the Society received the flags in 1905 through an act of the legislature. By that time the collection had grown to include flags and guidons of Kansas regiments raised for the Spanish-American War. Nine years later, reverence for the flags was at a peak as they were transferred ceremoniously to the new Memorial Building, a Civil War monument itself. The parade of members of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) carrying the relics to the building was viewed as "a sacred service, the last supper of the flags."<sup>10</sup> In the Historical Society's new quarters the flags became the nucleus of the organization's collection of war relics. The GAR established its own museum there, the war-related artifacts to become, much later, part of the Historical Society's collection.

Before 1899 the Society received its first fragment of the battleship USS *Maine*, destroyed in Havana Harbor in 1898. More fragments were donated later as the amassing of relics of the Spanish-American War and the Philippine Insurrection continued. Clothing and accouterments of Rough Riders, buttons from the uniform of a Spanish infantryman, a captured Filipino battle flag, and ammunition from battle sites were received and exhibited. In the years 1899 and 1900, 477 war relics were counted among the acquisitions. A few were from the Civil War, but the majority were collected by the participants in the battles being fought at that very time. An outstanding gift was J. W. Ozias' large collection of Filipino materials and items related to the Twentieth Kansas Infantry. As with Civil War artifacts, the donation of Spanish-American War

objects peaked within twenty years of the event and then dwindled down to a trickle that has never stopped.

Soon after World War I ended the Society began to prepare for the great influx of relics expected in 1919. The west room of the museum was set aside and items came in, but not at the rate expected. Notable was Gov. Henry J. Allen's gift of 173 French war posters. The World War I collection grew gradually over the years.

By the time the Kansas State Historical Society was ten years old, the romantic interpretation of American history was outdated among professional historians. The development of the country was no longer seen as a dramatization of events under the influence of Great Men who represented the best attributes and ideals of a forward-moving people.<sup>11</sup> The old attitudes, however, were not easy to dislodge from the public mind, and Great Men were still credited with superhuman influence. A cult-like admiration for two nineteenth-century figures, Abraham Lincoln and John Brown, had its effect on the collections of the Historical Society. Into the museum came the banner presented to Lincoln in 1858 as he debated with Stephen A. Douglas in Galesburg, Illinois; an umbrella used by the Great Emancipator; a pot lid that had belonged to his mother Nancy Hanks Lincoln; a watch chain made from a lightning rod from the old Lincoln home; and most precious of all, a Ford's Theater program onto which had fallen a drop of his blood. Other objects with Lincoln associations continued to be donated one at a time, although in 1917 the collection of Leavenworth dressmaker Carrie Hall was deposited with the Historical Society. For many years Mrs. Hall had been gathering Lincoln material of every description: photographs, campaign pamphlets, books, sheet music, portraits, busts, pottery decorated with Lincoln's likeness, medals, a piece of wood from his place of birth, a lamp with his profile molded into its shade. Mrs. Hall's collection was installed in a separate room at the Historical Society where it remained a place of honor until the 1960s remodeling of the Memorial Building.

Artifacts used by John Brown were prevalent among donations to the Society early in its development. During the 1870s and 1880s the Society received his cap, a bowie knife which he captured in 1856, pistols he carried during the Kansas troubles, pikes and an ax with which he armed his Harpers Ferry raiders, and a piece of wood from a station on the

11. George Bancroft, *The History of the United States of America from the Discovery of the Continent*, abridged and edited by Russel B. Nye (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Phoenix Books, 1966), xiii-xxvi.

10. *Topeka State Journal*, May 27, 1914.

underground railroad where he stopped on his last fugitive slave run from the state. When the gallows upon which John Brown was hanged was offered for sale, the *Lawrence Herald-Tribune* editorialized that the State Historical Society should purchase the item to go with its collection of relics related to the man.<sup>12</sup> Although the purchase was not pursued, a fragment of those gallows found its way into the collection in 1915. In 1886 it was suggested that a separate room be set aside at the Historical Society to honor John Brown, but such a place was never arranged.<sup>13</sup> The high regard that Kansans had for their martyred champion was demonstrated in other ways. Friends presented portraits and a bust. His children chose the "Society as the appropriate custodian of the memorials of their illustrious father" when they donated the gold medal that a group led by Victor Hugo had cast as a testimony to John Brown's sacrifice for human rights.<sup>14</sup>

The homage paid to Lincoln and Brown through the collection of relics was counterbalanced by the intensity with which William Clarke Quantrill was condemned as the antithesis of the Great Man. The proslavery guerrilla leader was remembered

for his destructiveness, and artifacts donated to the Historical Society perpetuated this memory. Smashed and scorched mirrors, melted windowpanes, and burned ceramic cups from his 1863 raid on Lawrence were collected for the museum. The most controversial relics in the history of the Society came in the late 1880s in a donation from W. W. Scott, who claimed to have opened Quantrill's grave to retrieve his bones. The bones were not exhibited, but were stored in the Society's vault. Staff complied with endless requests to view the gruesome relics of the guerrilla, and debate raged over their authenticity. The GAR threatened to have Secretary George W. Martin removed from his position if he continued to harbor the remains of the enemy.<sup>15</sup>

The instances of donations of artifacts associated with Lincoln, Brown, and Quantrill became fewer and fewer as the twentieth century progressed. As with objects related to the wars, however, collection of such materials has not ceased.

In viewing photographs of the Historical Society's quarters in the statehouse and the early gallery arrangements in the Memorial Building, one notices immediately the rows of portraits covering the walls and hanging from columns. This forest of faces was the Society's hall of fame. A pet project

12. *Daily Herald-Tribune*, Lawrence, March 31, 1885.

13. *Saturday Evening Lance*, Topeka, February 6, 1886.

14. *Sixth Biennial Report, 1887-1888*, 8-9.

15. Langsdorf, "The First Hundred Years," 323-24.



*A section of the Society's portrait gallery in the State Capitol*

of the organization's secretaries was the acquisition of portraits of every governor of Kansas. They did well, and by 1915 the Society lacked only the portraits of Govs. Walter Stubbs and George Hodges. The pictures of lesser Kansas notables also were gladly received into the collection. In oils, crayons, woodcuts, and steel engravings were early settlers, war heroes, senators and representatives, generals, and a few women who had distinguished themselves through their work. Kansas citizens who had achieved local or statewide prominence were apt to donate portraits of themselves. Most of the pictures, however, were donated by the families or friends of the subject. Serving the same purpose of honoring and memorializing worthy Kansans was the collection of busts. Although far fewer in number than the portraits on the walls, the busts were also representative of a cross section of admired citizens.

The portraits were collected to memorialize their subjects, but many of them were fine works of art executed by such talented Kansas painters as George M. Stone and Henry Worrall. Of non-portrait artworks there were very few. Development of this portion of the Historical Society's collection took place slowly.

The professed interest of the Historical Society in collecting "objects illustrating the history and manners and customs of the Indians or other inhabitants"<sup>16</sup> led to the acquisition of great volumes of material. Farmers brought in prehistoric treasures found while they plowed their fields. Others actively pursued the discovery of Indian relics in all parts of the state and made up their own collections which they then turned over to the Historical Society. Such relics as tools, ornaments, and pottery fragments were popularly thought of as "object lessons for the instruction of the people in respect to the manners and customs of the red men...whose rude ways have given place to the kind of civilization which in our day has been planted here."<sup>17</sup> There was a great consciousness of the disappearance of one culture and its replacement with one considered to be superior. The Historical Society took a more scholarly approach in its own pursuit of archeological materials. In 1901, money from the institution's fee fund was allotted to a special committee "to examine and collect for the museum of the Society archaeological relics from the mounds and deserted village sites of the aborigines of Kansas."<sup>18</sup> From an early

date, much of the material for the museum was obtained in this manner, which involved serious research according to the standards of the time rather than amateur pothunting. Surface finds continued to be donated as the Society sought information on both aborigines and early explorers. An important acquisition came in 1923 when four thousand pieces of the Brower collection of Kansas artifacts were obtained from the Minnesota Historical Society in exchange for duplicate newspaper files.<sup>19</sup> No other part of the Society's museum collection grew as rapidly as the archeology section during the first fifty years. In later decades the archeology section became a distinct department within the Historical Society, and the archeological and ethnographic collections were separated from the collections of the museum.

As objects of popular curiosity, Indian relics ranked with the more exotic elements of the museum's holdings. Foreign cultures were subjects of great fascination. The soldiers of the Twentieth Kansas Infantry came back from the Philippines with hundreds of objects used by Filipinos in their daily lives. Maude Madden, a missionary in the Far East, made a large collection of Japanese items and donated it to the Historical Society in 1903. In 1920 the heirs of Lindley Perkins of Baxter Springs filled a freight car with the results of his worldwide souvenir hunting and sent it to the museum. Other individuals struck by the beauty, antiquity, uniqueness, or primitive qualities of items discovered in their travels dutifully brought them to their state museum.

The phenomena of nature were collected in the same spirit. A freak corn stalk, a sawfish bill, a giant clamshell, and a hair ball from the stomach of a cow took their places in the museum. A more serious detour into natural history was taken when the collection of the Academy of Science was moved to the new Memorial Building. Although Secretary William E. Connelley refused to house the live reptiles, he did gain for the museum one of its most popular exhibits, the Goss bird collection. Among the mounted specimens transferred to the care of the Historical Society were hundreds of skins of birds common to Kansas as well as rare birds of North America. These had been collected and prepared by Nathaniel S. Goss. The birds perched among the historical exhibits from 1915 until 1977 when, in the interests of properly preserving a valuable collection, they were transferred to the University

16. *Kansas Historical Collections, 1883-1885*, 3:16.

17. *Commonwealth*, Topeka, June 4, 1880 (daily edition).

18. *Thirteenth Biennial Report, 1900-1902*, 4.

19. Langsdorf, "The First Hundred Years," 346-47.



*The Goss bird collection*

of Kansas. Seashells, a buffalo head, and mounted antlers remain in the museum collection as a testimony to the wide-ranging interests of the Historical Society and its patrons.

Awareness of history as it was being made and an interest in preserving aspects of the immediate, contemporary environment contributed to the broad character of the early museum collection. Specimens of Kansas' natural resources such as coal and marble were donated to the museum as they were mined and quarried. Products of manufacturers like the Larned Pottery Works were collected as they were produced. "Buffalo Jones'" campaign to perpetuate the American bison led him to donate hosiery and mittens woven from buffalo hair in 1892. Members of such groups as the National Education Association and the Grand Army of the Republic brought their membership badges and reunion souvenirs to the museum. Calendars advertising contemporary businesses were collected as were posters, ribbons, and tickets from the current county fairs. Pens used in signing legislation and materials from the 1900 Democratic National Convention were donated soon after the events took place. The 1893 "Legislative War," in which Populists and Republicans literally fought for control of the Kansas House of Representatives, yielded such items as the sledge used

by Speaker George L. Douglass to chop through the door to the House chamber. Months later the artifacts were in the museum. Four members of the outlaw Dalton gang were killed in Coffeyville on October 5, 1892. Within days scraps of fabric cut from their trousers arrived at the Historical Society.

At the same time contemporary materials were being donated to the museum, a significant number of relics from the American colonial, revolutionary, and early federal periods were being gathered. Citizens of the very young state of Kansas sought connections with the earliest settling of their country, with the founding of the republic, and with the political and cultural development of the early national character. Documents, books, paintings, and monuments provided informational links that were more abstract than real. The possession of concrete, three-dimensional evidence of the existence of those temporally and geographically remote people, places, and events became an important component in Kansans' conceptualization of the American past. Welcomed into the Historical Society were donations of "pieces of the true cross" (as today's curators term them) including a chunk of Plymouth Rock, a vial of tea from the Boston Tea Party, a piece of a tree into which Daniel Boone had carved a message, a platter from which the Marquis de Lafayette was

served wild turkey, and numerous other relics of this sort.<sup>20</sup> Interest in such items spawned a late-nineteenth-century phenomenon among private collectors that had a nationwide impact on museum collections: the transformation of relic fragments into other forms.<sup>21</sup> The Historical Society received its share, collecting during the 1880s, for example, a gavel made of wood taken from Constitution Hall in Philadelphia; a mallet made from a rib taken from the ship *Old Ironsides*; and a goblet made from a piece of the joist from Christ Church where George Washington and his family worshipped.

Artifacts valued for their associations with the well-known facts of history continued to be collected over the next few decades, but from the 1890s through the 1920s Kansans also shared in the national interest in collecting objects of personal genealogical importance. Family heirlooms passed down from great-great-grandparents shared the spotlight with relics which had touched Lafayette's and Washington's lives. Watches, pipe tongs, powder horns, musical instruments, and woven coverlets dating from the 1750s to

the 1830s came to Kansas' museum. The interest in family antiques was inextricably bound to the late-nineteenth-century wave of nationalism that gave rise to such patriotic organizations as the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR). Museums across the country benefitted from the work of these groups. Upon receiving some of the many artifacts gathered for the Kansas State Historical Society by the DAR, Secretary Connelley expressed his commitment to "preserving and displaying the priceless relics remaining in the Kansas families of the descendants of those who founded the Republic."<sup>22</sup>

A romantic view of colonial and early American life prevailed and was justified and reinforced by such artifacts. People were heroic, their surroundings were quaint, and their lives were imagined to be less complex than those of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Americans.<sup>23</sup> The spinning wheel became an icon of the simple and true way of life that was supposed to have been enjoyed by our ancestors.<sup>24</sup> In Kansas the productive use of the spinning wheel had seen a rapid decline during the 1850s. In 1889 the

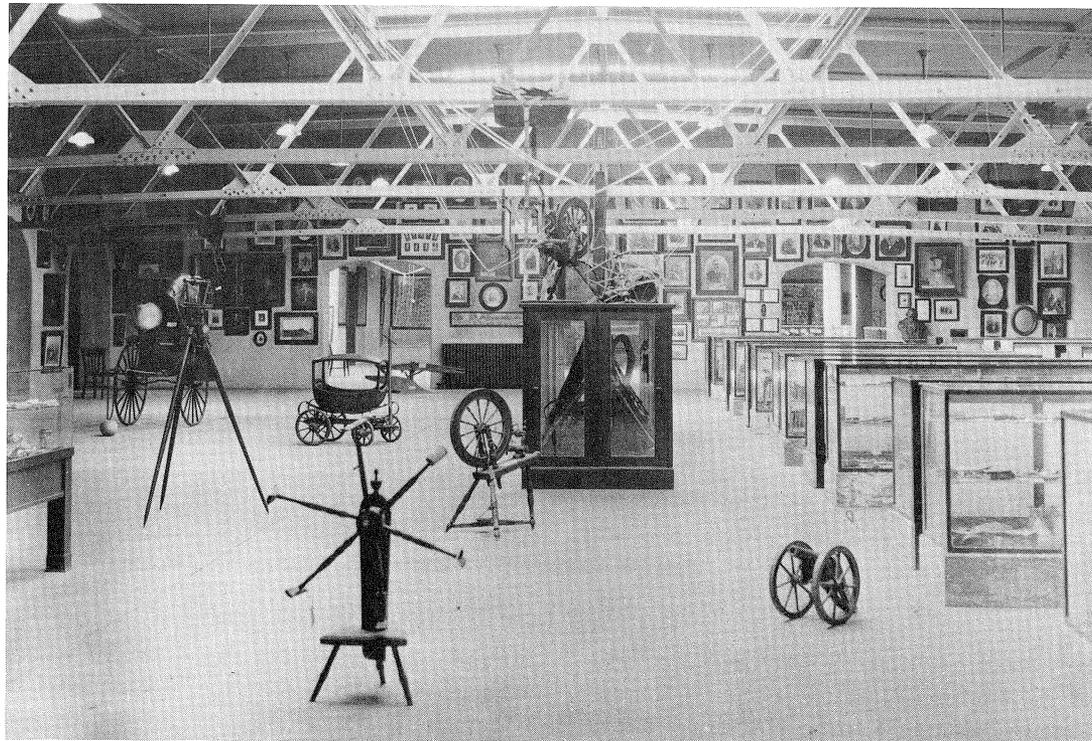
20. Brooke Hindle, "How Much Is a Piece of the True Cross Worth?" in *Material Culture and the Study of American Life*, ed. Ian M. G. Quimby (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1978), 5-20.

21. Elizabeth Stillinger, *The Antiquers* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980), 20-21.

22. *Twenty-fourth Biennial Report, 1922-1924*, 19.

23. Stillinger, *The Antiquers*, xii, 5.

24. Christopher Monkhouse, "The Spinning Wheel as Artifact, Symbol and Source of Design," in *Victorian Furniture: Essays from a Victorian Society Autumn Symposium*, ed. Kenneth L. Ames, published as *Nineteenth Century* 8, nos. 3-4 (1982):159.



*Spinning wheels were displayed prominently in the Memorial Building galleries.*

Historical Society collection received its first spinning wheel. Several more were donated over the next two decades as the once-utilitarian artifacts became symbols of patriotism. These were relics that reminded museum visitors of the colonial roots of democracy.<sup>25</sup> In a further glorification of ancestral life-styles, turn-of-the-century citizens considered early American furnishings to be morally and aesthetically superior to goods produced within their own lifetimes. Furniture of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and very early nineteenth centuries became models of design and craftsmanship. The Historical Society took this point of view as it collected several fine specimens including a Sheraton chest of drawers and a chair of the hearts-and-crowns style.<sup>26</sup>

From the time the Historical Society obtained its first museum object, donations were the means by which the great majority of its collections were acquired. Five years after the founding of the Society, a Topeka newspaper columnist wrote, "It is true, in Kansas, that our people have a conviction that Kansas has made more and better history than any state or country ever before made in so brief a time; and all take an interest and pride in contributing to the collection of the materials of such history."<sup>27</sup> Donations came from Topeka, from all parts of the state, and from all over the country, most of them unsolicited. Kansas newspapers, especially those in Topeka, often contained articles about curiosities, discoveries, and historic artifacts such as Jotham Meeker's printing press, closing the columns with calls to donate such prized items to the Historical Society.<sup>28</sup>

Sometimes the institution engaged in a bit of self-promotion. During the 1880s the Society printed and circulated at least two editions of a handbill entitled "Objects of Collection Desired by The Kansas State Historical Society." The handbills listed in exhaustive detail exactly what was wanted and included mention of antiquities, paintings, and curiosities of all kinds as well as a very specific list of Indian artifacts. In a separate handbill entitled "Indian Relics and History" an even more explicit list of desired Indian relics named twenty-three tribes and stated the types of documents and artifacts desired to represent them. Between 1881 and 1882 yet another handbill was distributed, this one addressed "To the Soldiers in Kansas," asking

them and their families to memorialize the Civil War by donating written materials and artifacts to their State Historical Society. The soldiers were eloquently coaxed to give "the relics which they brought home from battlefields, from their camps and from their weary marches." Appealing to pragmatism and pride, the plea went on:

True, these may be treasured up as personal mementoes, and kept to be handed down in the family as heirlooms. But experience teaches that efforts to preserve relics generally fail, through the accidents of time. Placed in a public collection, with just credit given to the donor for the deposit, they there remain, a perpetual testimonial of honor to the donor and thus are made to subserve the two objects—of personal and family pride, and of public advantage.<sup>29</sup>

Newspapers aided the Society by paraphrasing the solicitation in their columns, as did the *Camp Fire*, a publication of the Grand Army of the Republic. In the nation's capital the *Washington World and Citizen Soldier* urged all states and all soldiers to follow the example set in Kansas by the Historical Society's active collection of war materials.<sup>30</sup> Efforts in Kansas were successful. Included among the items received as a result of the soldiers' handbill was a saber taken from a Confederate soldier serving under Gen. James Johnston Pettigrew.<sup>31</sup> Before the close of World War I a solicitation campaign of a lesser intensity was launched to gather relics from soldiers and their families.

More direct solicitations were employed by both Historical Society officers and Kansas citizens. In 1900 Secretary Martin asked J. H. Simmons of Lawrence to donate a bust of Sen. James Lane which had occupied a niche on the stairway of the Simmons home for thirty-five years. Although Simmons wrote that it was like parting with a member of the family, he conceded that Martin was right, the Historical Society was indeed a proper place for the bust.<sup>32</sup> In a 1915 newspaper article Society President J. N. Harrison called for the residents of Franklin County to clear their

25. Harvey Green, "The Ironies of Style: Complexities and Contradictions in American Decorative Arts, 1850-1900," in *Victorian Furniture*, 27.

26. Stillinger, *The Antiquers*, xii.

27. *Weekly Capital*, Topeka, January 20, 1880.

28. *Daily Commonwealth*, Topeka, May 13, 1887.

29. Handbill, "Objects of Collection Desired by The Kansas State Historical Society" [prior to 1888]; Handbill, "Objects of Collection Desired by the Kansas State Historical Society" [ca. 1888]; Handbill, "Indian Relics and History," n.d.; Handbill, "The Kansas State Historical Society: To the Soldiers in Kansas" [1881-1882], Kansas State Historical Society Library.

30. *Wyandotte Gazette*, Kansas City, May 26, 1882; *Camp Fire*, Cawker City, August 15, 1882; *Washington World and Citizen Soldier*, Washington, D. C., October 14, 1882.

31. *Topeka Daily Capital*, August 13, 1882.

32. *Topeka State Journal* [1900].

“attics, chests and closets” of the relics that were hidden there. He went on to list the names of people he knew to be harboring historical materials and said he wanted those items “right up here” in the Historical Society.<sup>33</sup> A Burlingame resident visiting in Lancaster, New Hampshire, in 1883 saw a banner made by Lancaster women for presentation to the Fremont Club for the 1856 campaign. The banner was emblazoned with a “God Save Kansas” motto, and the good Kansas citizen decided that his State Historical Society should have the artifact. The owner of the banner was convinced by the Kansan’s arguments and sent the relic to the Society.<sup>34</sup>

A small percentage of the collection was purchased using funds from various sources. The 1878 purchase of the Thomas Webb collection of New England Emigrant Aid Company materials netted for the museum the candlebox in which fraudulent election returns were concealed beneath a woodpile following the Lecompton Constitutional Convention. The famous cannon “Old Kickapoo” was saved from destruction when Historical Society members raised \$112 to buy it from a scrap dealer in 1884. In 1895 the state legislature granted funds to the Society for the purchase of an oil portrait of Sen. Preston B. Plumb, and in 1911 the institution purchased Henry Worrall’s painting of the Kansas-Colorado Building at the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia.

Many of the materials collected by the Historical Society were given by their owners as “conditional deposits” or loans. Secretary Connelley wished to have only the true possessions of the Historical Society on exhibit, and in 1924 he initiated efforts to locate the lenders of artifacts so that loans could be converted to gifts. The generosity of lenders in following Connelley’s suggestions gained for the institution permanent custody of many valuable historic artifacts.

The year 1925 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Kansas State Historical Society. During that time its museum collection had become a notable entity within the institution. Its 12,908 artifacts and dozens of artworks were becoming more than a sideshow to the library.<sup>35</sup> Thematic groupings in cases and galleries rather than haphazard visible storage of objects gave evidence of an evolution in the Society’s attitudes toward the artifacts. They could entertain. They could serve as catalysts to interest casual visitors in Kansas history.<sup>36</sup> They could be measured against

contemporary lifestyles to show human progress.<sup>37</sup> Changes in patterns of donations could also be detected. Donations of artifacts associated with cataclysmic events and Great Men, “pieces of the true cross,” and natural and exotic curiosities came to the museum in a steady flow during the institution’s first five decades. Toward the turn of the century, however, the possessions of the less prominent Kansas citizen began to appear beside them. Objects of common personal experience were by no means abundant in the museum yet, but their gradual appearance gave hints of what was to become a collecting trend in later years.

The number of donations to the museum increased from year to year, showing significant periods of growth at times of change for the Historical Society. The 1901 move to new, more spacious rooms in the statehouse was declared by Secretary Martin to have stimulated “gifts, adding vastly to the importance of our portrait and museum features.”<sup>38</sup> Thirteen years later another surge of donations was noted as the Historical Society was settling into the new Memorial Building. The large open spaces of the fourth floor allowed the museum to acquire artifacts previously impossible to house in the cramped, old quarters of the statehouse. A Concord stagecoach and a Victoria carriage appeared in the gallery. Other phenomena were credited with stimulating donations. Early in the 1920s Secretary Connelley attributed unusually large numbers of donations to “the breaking up of the old families in the state and the searching for a suitable place to deposit valuable relics.”<sup>39</sup>

As the Historical Society moved into its second half century, the nationwide economic crisis of the late 1920s and 1930s had both positive and negative effects on the museum. The number of donations dropped dramatically, but the existing collections benefitted greatly from federal relief programs. Between 1934 and 1943 workers with the Federal Emergency Relief Administration and its state organization, the Kansas Emergency Relief Committee, cleaned thirty thousand relics, restored pictures and frames, and repaired furniture, generally improving the appearance of the artifacts.

Donations to the museum from the late 1930s to the early 1950s established a pattern that was to become familiar in the following decades. The days of collecting natural curiosities and souvenirs of exotic cultures were past. The museum now received more artifacts

33. *Evening Herald*, Ottawa, February 3, 1915.

34. *Daily Commonwealth*, Topeka, August 23, 1883.

35. *Twenty-fifth Biennial Report, 1924-1926*, 23.

36. *Twenty-first Biennial Report, 1917-1919*, 13.

37. *Nineteenth Biennial Report, 1912-1914*, 75.

38. *Ibid.*

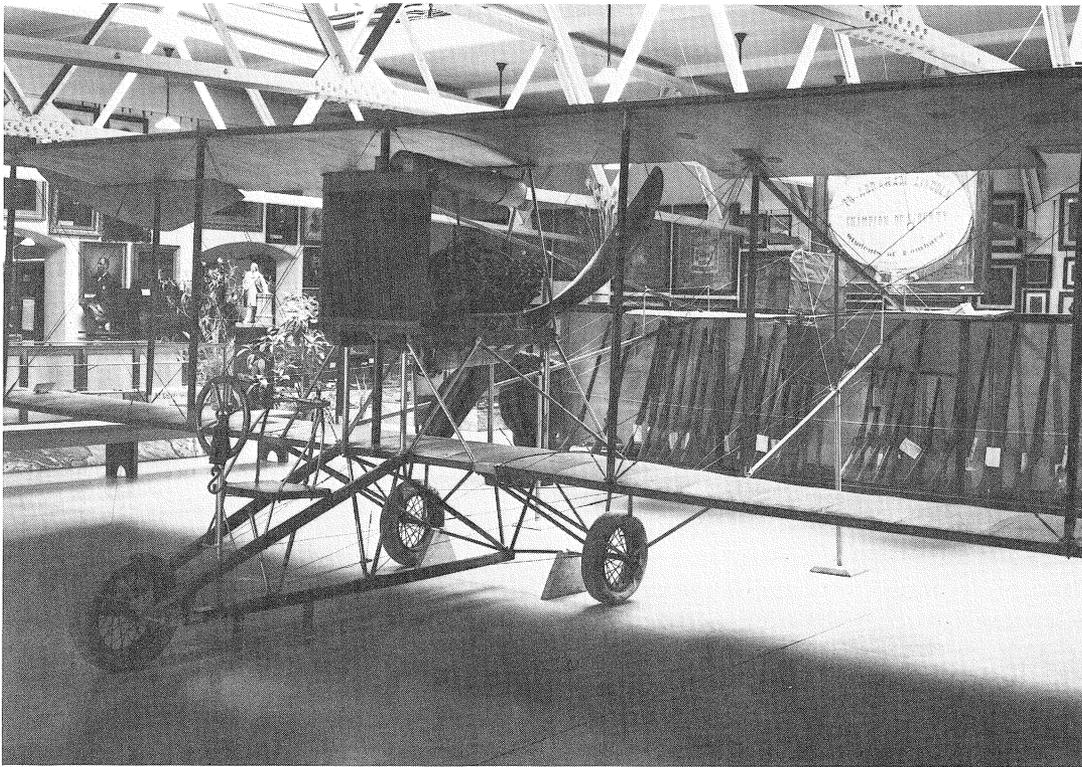
39. *Twenty-third Biennial Report, 1920-1922*, 10.

representative of early Kansas manufacturers, businesses, and professions. Objects used in agriculture and medicine were notable among the acquisitions. Gifts ranged from an 1870 self-rake reaper to lanterns made by the Coleman Lamp Company to wooden shoes worn in the 1850s by a brewmaster while he raked hops at one of the first breweries in the state. Artifacts associated with prominent people, places, and events continued to be donated. Personal possessions of William Allen White, Charles Curtis, and Dwight Eisenhower were acquired, as was the sofa upon which Harriet Beecher Stowe reportedly sat as she listened to the story that inspired her to write *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Family heirlooms of the colonial and early American periods were still received, but heirlooms of a different nature also appeared in the collection. Donated were objects that had come to Kansas during the 1870s through the 1890s with immigrant families from the British Isles, continental Europe, and the states of Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, Pennsylvania, Iowa, and Nebraska. Relics of the wars continued to trickle in, the stream swelling as Kansans returned home after World War II and the Historical Society once again launched a solicitation campaign for war relics.

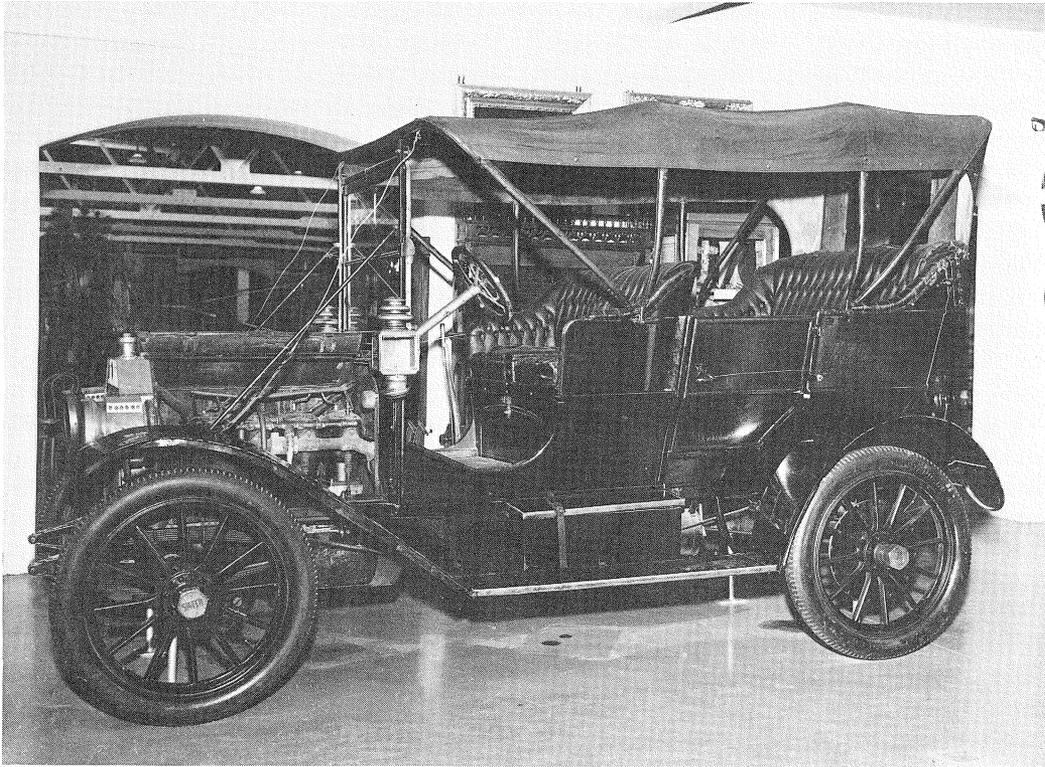
The collection of artworks grew during this period. Acquisitions were as diverse as Birger Sandzen lithographs; paintings of livestock by Gutzon Borglum; a huge naive oil painting, *The Spirit of Kansas*, done in 1891 by a seventy-six-year-old Kansas woman, Mary Weston; and Walt Kelly's original cartoon panel of the Kansas Jayhawk visiting Pogo's Okefenokee Swamp. The collection of Kansas portraits also increased steadily.

The most publicized donation of the period was the airplane manufactured in Topeka by the Longren brothers and flown over the city by pioneer aviator Philip Billard in 1912. A day-long celebration with political dignitaries in attendance marked its arrival at the Memorial Building in 1938. Joining the plane in the transportation category was the 1908 Great Smith automobile, also manufactured in Topeka.

During the two-decade period spanning the mid-1950s through the mid-1970s, donations continued to come to the museum at a high rate. The pattern established in the previous two decades continued in the variety of artifacts acquired. Children's items, especially toys, became prominent among the objects received as did the ephemera associated with political campaigns. The biggest boom, however, took place



*The Longren airplane in the Memorial Building. Framed by one of the wings is the banner presented by Lombard College students to Abraham Lincoln.*



*The Great Smith automobile in the Memorial Building*

in two previously underdeveloped areas of the collection, clothing and middle-class decorative arts and domestic accessories.

Very few items of clothing had been acquired by the museum. Prior to the 1950s this area of the collection was represented by a few foreign costumes, military uniforms, and articles belonging to notables (John Brown's hat and George Armstrong Custer's boots, for example). By the 1970s hundreds of dresses, shirts, hats, shoes, capes, and accessories made up a costume collection representing clothing in Kansas from the 1870s to the 1910s. Like many other museum collections, Kansas' holdings emphasize women's fashions, especially wedding dresses, and contain relatively few examples of men's clothing.

An approach previously used in acquiring war relics was tried and found very successful in developing the collection of decorative arts and domestic accessories. The method involved planning an exhibit and then advertising for the artifacts to fill it. From the mid-1950s through the 1960s period rooms were being constructed in the exhibit galleries. In articles printed in newspapers and the Historical Society's newsletter, the *Mirror*, museum staff noted that "many donors have not considered some of the 'homlier' household

items worth giving to the Society."<sup>40</sup> For five years the public and the membership of the Historical Society were reminded in print that a sod house, a general store, a Victorian parlor, a 1910 farm kitchen, a doctor's office, a blacksmith shop, and other period rooms were under construction in the museum. With the reminders were lists of items needed to complete the exhibits: wood-burning stoves, a dentist's chair, plain furniture of the type a homesteader would have used, a parlor sofa, common kitchen tools. Dozens of other objects were mentioned. The response was nearly overwhelming. The period rooms were filled rapidly, and many additional artifacts representing the everyday lives of Kansans at work and at home were donated. Later, in the development of thematic case exhibits, the same techniques were used to obtain appropriate artifacts, and they were equally successful.

The museum's acquisitions in the 1970s continued to be characterized by objects representative of the lifestyles of Kansas residents as well as by the same types of objects collected in the previous four decades. A renewed interest in collecting contemporary materials gained for the museum such items as mini-

40. "New Museum Program Is Now Underway," *Mirror* 1 (March 1955):1.

skirts, Cub Scout uniforms, Sesame Street puppets, Star Wars gift wrapping paper, and groundbreaking shovels used by state officials. A significant purchase was made in 1979 when the Society acquired for its museum the Winchester 1866 presentation rifle, engraved in 1871 as a gift from Gov. Samuel J. Crawford to Gov. Nehemiah Green.

During the mid-twentieth century, attitudes toward the museum collection were changing markedly as the educational value of artifacts was firmly acknowledged. In addition to serving as tools for teachers, the Historical Society's museum artifacts were valued as tourist attractions capable of bringing visitors to the state to spend their vacation money.<sup>41</sup> The period of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s was one of development in the area of material culture studies. Museum objects came to be recognized as documents in themselves, full of information to be "read" and interpreted for visitors

41. Nyle H. Miller, "The Secretary's Desk," *Mirror* 4 (January 1958):2.

to the galleries. All vestiges of the cabinet of curiosities had disappeared from the Historical Society.

Into the 1980s the museum staff has brought the determination to refine and improve the collection of artifacts through a conscientiously applied acquisitions program. The purposes of the Historical Society are foremost in mind when appropriate donations are accepted for the collection. New patterns in collecting are being established, based on assessments of what is needed to make the collection more representative of Kansas and Kansans. Topical and temporal gaps are being filled. There is a new awareness of the need to collect the present for the future. More than ever, projected interpretive programs serve as guidelines for acquiring certain types of artifacts. The impact of the new Kansas Museum of History on the collection is immeasurable. Not only did the building make it possible for the Historical Society to acquire its largest artifact, the *Cyrus K. Holliday* train, but it also allows the institution to remind the people of Kansas that theirs is a fine material heritage worthy of preservation.

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