



MEMORIAL BUILDING



KANSAS MUSEUM OF HISTORY

Preface

“HISTORY is one of Kansas’ major cultural and education resources. Its historical heritage must be adequately preserved and protected” (*Wichita Eagle*, February 12, 1980). “The Museum is Kansas, and Kansans. It is to live and grow as we have lived and will live, and grow” (*Olathe Daily News*, May 11, 1980). “Let’s build a museum soon” (*Topeka Daily Capital*, March 29, 1979). Using these phrases and many more, Kansas newspaper editors throughout the state supported the development of the Kansas Museum of History. With few exceptions, they called on legislators to pass the necessary appropriation in the spring of 1980 and followed the planning and construction over the next four years with enthusiasm. Such advocacy was both welcome and appropriate, for the Society can trace its origins to that April day in 1875 when editor Daniel Webster Wilder, then serving as state auditor, encouraged the Kansas Editors’ and Publishers’ Association to form a state historical society to save “the present and past records of our twenty-one years of eventful history.” The members took steps to organize the group shortly thereafter, and from then on editors played a prominent role in the development of the Society.

Now, in June 1984, a new era opens for the Kansas State Historical Society with the dedication of the Kansas Museum of History. Standing near the Pottawatomie Baptist Mission on a branch of the Oregon Trail, the museum symbolizes Kansans’ commitment to their heritage, a past that encompasses Spanish conquistadores and native Americans, cattlemen and railroaders, overlanders and farmers, blacks and German-Russians and Swedes. All and more are part of the tapestry of Kansas history that will be collected, preserved, and interpreted in the museum.

To celebrate the dedication, this special issue of *Kansas History* is devoted to aspects of the Kansas Museum of History discussed within the context of the history of the Society. To set the scene, Larry O. Jochims, research historian, has prepared an account of the concept and the construction of the Memorial Building, where the Society moved in 1914 from its first home in the Capitol. Following his article are brief accounts of the departments that will remain in this “classic in marble,” now designated the Center for Historical Research.

Museum Director Mark A. Hunt next describes



the design of the new museum, taking readers on a tour of the galleries and other public areas as well as behind the scenes into the laboratories and storage areas. The photographic essay on the construction that follows captures some moments from the groundbreaking to the moving of the *Cyrus K. Holliday* locomotive into the building. Next, Mary W. Madden and Maureen A. Hart contrast the move from the Capitol to the Memorial Building with the move to the new museum seventy years later. Completing this section are the remarks Joseph W. Snell, Thomas F. Averill, and William G. Winter delivered at the dedication of Lumen Winter’s *Great White Buffalo* sculpture in the fall of 1983.

In the second part of the issue, Mary Ellen Hennessey Nottage traces the history of the museum collection from the first “antiquities” housed among the library books in the statehouse to the most recent acquisitions. Martha Durant Kratsas and Robert F. McGiffin describe how these artifacts are managed and conserved, while James Powers discusses past and present museum education activities. James H. Nottage, Floyd R. Thomas, Jr., and Lucinda Simmons Bray recount the development of the exhibition program from the displays in the Capitol to the interpretive exhibits planned for the new museum. The issue concludes with “Samples of Our Heritage,” the catalog of the first special exhibit, by James R. Kratsas, Mary Ellen Hennessey Nottage, and John Zwierzyna.

Marking both an end and a beginning, the dedication of the Kansas Museum of History is a milestone for the Society and for Kansas. It is hoped that this special issue of *Kansas History* will serve, like the museum itself, not only as a record of the past but also as a guide to the future. KH