

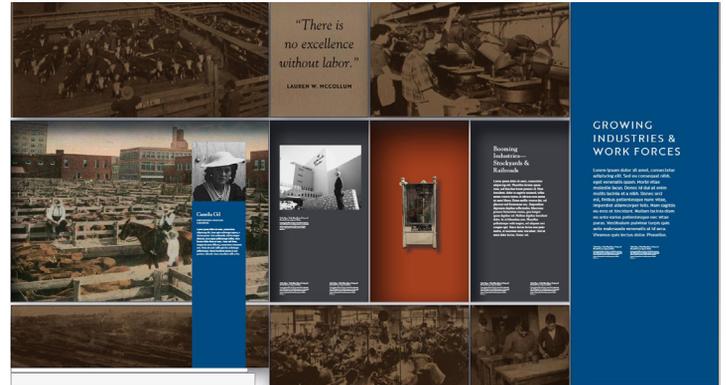
A RESTORATIVE APPROACH FOR A CITY MUSEUM

Transformation Beyond Construction

By the Kansas City Museum Education Team

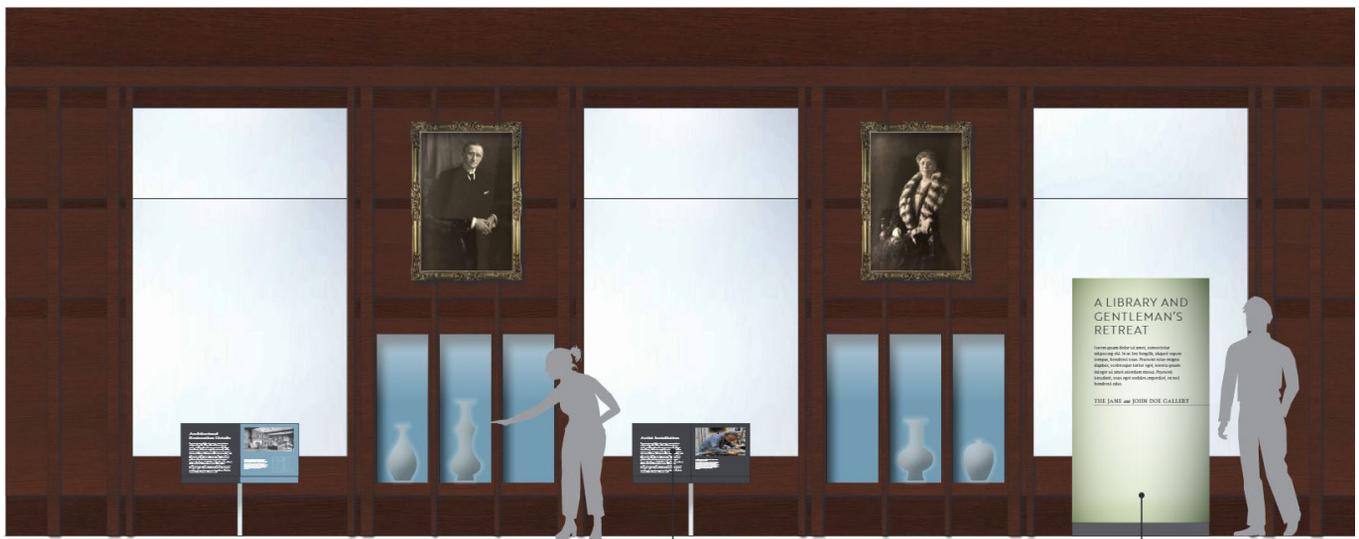
Words matter. How we choose, use, and define our words, how we set them in context — can have a significant and lasting impact on our relationships and our stories. Restoration is an important and familiar word for the Kansas City Museum. The Museum has been in various phases of restoration over many years, with a comprehensive initiative launched in 2014 (when the Parks and Recreation Department took over the management and operation of the Museum) to restore and renovate all five original Beaux-Arts style buildings on the property in three main stages of construction with each stage opening to the public upon completion.

In 2019, the Museum completed architectural construction at Corinthian Hall with International Architects Atelier and JE Dunn Construction and exhibition design with Gallagher & Associates — getting exhibitions and interactive digital technologies prepared for fabrication and installation in 2020. In addition, the Museum began the process of developing the history- and humanities-based education and public programs that will add another layer of learning to the exhibitions and interpretive experiences. This process began with the realization that the word “restoration” held meaning for the Museum beyond design and construction, and in fact, the word “restoration” could be explored in terms of creating transformative, accessible programming for an audience of diverse visitors.



Concept rendering of the Second Floor Exhibition Gallery, Thriving Populations & Flourishing Industries, 1910s to 1940s.

A team of educators including Blanca Anchondo-Polite, Lisa Middlebrook, and Oralee McKinzy — experienced in curriculum development, community organizing, and youth leadership — has been working with the Museum staff and its partners to employ a restorative practices methodology to develop the core education and public programs for children, youth, and families. Restorative practices focuses on how to work with community,



Concept rendering of the First Floor Charles and Anna Milbank Library.

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Concept rendering of the Third Floor Neighborhood Gallery, is co-designed with UMKC's Center for Neighborhoods and students from UMKC's Department of Architecture, Urban Planning and Design.

circles, or councils to co-create and negotiate truth. Often found in the context of social work and some innovative judicial systems and schools, restorative practices is a process that intentionally connects people; it aims to include all perspectives with the goal of repairing trust and unity between individuals and communities. Restorative practices values and prioritizes healthy and equitable relationships – how to form, maintain, and restore them after conflict or harm has been done. Restorative practices recognizes that every individual story has meaning and is comprised of – and leads to – a multiplicity of voices and a shared experience that transcends the boundaries and borders that separate us. This approach often stands in contrast with traditional ways of telling history, wherein one dominant and sometimes exclusive point of view drives the narrative.

The Kansas City Museum, like most longstanding cultural organizations, has its own storied past filled with major achievements and celebrations, trials and tribulations, stops and starts, and dreams and aspirations. Nearly 80 years old as a public institution (the Kansas City Museum opened in May 1940 as the City's history museum and served as the private estate of Robert Alexander Long and his family from 1910 to 1934), with more than 100,000 historical objects, the Kansas City Museum is asking some critical questions through the process of developing programs: "Whose stories are missing, and how do we share them? What are the gaps in the collection? What stories have largely been untold, and how do we tell them? How do we present a more inclusive story of our City's history in collaboration with other local museums, archives, and libraries?"

The Kansas City Museum team believes that a restorative practices approach will guide these inquiries and lead to working directly with the community to co-present Kansas City's history and cultural heritage with new and critical narratives unfolding over time through programming. The first step in developing education and public programs using a restorative practices methodology is community engagement. This has included one-



Concept rendering of the Third Floor Story Sharing Space where visitors will experience oral histories.

on-one meetings between Museum educators and residents and group input sessions. Museum educators are reviewing the Museum's exhibition design plans, exploring the meaning of historical artifacts, learning about the past and current perceptions of the Museum, gathering a list of stories that have not been told, and understanding the kinds of programs that are wanted and needed. Restorative community engagement takes time, and the Museum is investing the time and resources necessary to be authentic and honest, and to create a participatory learning environment that will illuminate City's past, celebrate its present, and (re)imagine its future.

The Kansas City Museum's vision is that future visitors will see their history and heritage represented in the exhibitions and educational programming, and when and if they do not, they will have an opportunity to share their stories and actively participate in expanding and deepening the representation.

History matters, and the Kansas City Museum aims to be the home of the whole story.