

History & Future of the Kansas City Museum

From Private Estate to Public Museum

The Kansas City Museum—located at 3218 Gladstone Boulevard, Kansas City, Missouri 64123—is housed in the former Beaux-Arts style residence of Robert Alexander Long (R.A. Long) and his family. R.A. Long was a lumber magnate, civic leader, and philanthropist who owned Long-Bell Lumber Company. He had a wife Ella and two daughters Sallie America Long Ellis and Loula Long Combs. Mr. Long built and completed the family estate in 1910, choosing to live on Gladstone Boulevard due to the proximity of North Terrace Park (now called Kessler Park) and Independence Boulevard Christian Church.

The Long family estate included six (6) Beaux-Arts style structures: Corinthian Hall, a four-story mansion; Carriage House, in which R.A. Long's famed equestrienne daughter Loula housed her horses and many trophies; Conservatory for plants; Caretaker's House, which served as the home for the horse trainer; Gardener's Tool Shop and Planting Shed (now called the Carpenter's Shed); and Greenhouse.

After Mr. and Mrs. Long died (1928 and 1934 respectively), the daughters donated the estate (all buildings and grounds) in 1939 to the Kansas City Museum Association, a nonprofit that was formed to use the estate as a public museum for local and regional history. The Kansas City Museum opened to the public in 1940, with only a small portion of Corinthian Hall available for public exhibitions. Opening just before WWII, the Museum's resources were strained, and the Museum decided to close for a portion of the war. Upon reopening, the Museum faced a financial crisis that eventually led the Kansas City Museum Association to offer the Museum and all exhibits to the City of Kansas City, Missouri. The Museum was sold to the City in 1948, with the Kansas City Museum Association and its small staff staying on to operate and manage the Museum.

The Kansas City Museum Association continued to operate and manage the Museum for decades, and it worked hard to grow the Museum and expand its general history focus to natural history and science. The Museum was a beloved and iconic institution in Kansas City, attracting over 150,000 visitors in its heyday including serving thousands of students and teachers each year.

Organizational Transitions

In the 1990s, the Kansas City Museum began to reevaluate its interpretative program, and it became a primary goal of the board of directors of the Kansas City Museum Association to create a science center—something Kansas City didn't have. Since the Museum didn't have the space to fully develop science other than natural history, the board and staff began to work in earnest to fund a new science center. Instead of building a new building, however, it became clear that the best option was to look at the empty Union Station in downtown Kansas City as the home for the science facility. Therefore, in combination with Union Station Assistance Corporation, the Kansas City Museum worked toward passing the Bi-State Cultural Tax that would fund a fully restored Union Station and allow the Museum to bring the long-sought science center to fruition, which is now Science City at Union Station.

In 2001, the Kansas City Museum Association merged with Union Station Assistance Corporation and created Union Station Kansas City which included Science City, exhibit galleries, theaters, and restaurants, in the rehabilitated 1914 train station. The Kansas City Museum remained committed to the

study and exhibition of local and regional history at the original Gladstone Boulevard site. Deciding that the natural history specimens were past their prime, all of the specimens found new homes at institutions more fully devoted to the natural sciences, such as the University of Kansas at Lawrence.

New Management & Sustainability

While all of the aforementioned major organizational transitions were taking place, the buildings and grounds of the Kansas City Museum continued to fall further and further into disrepair due to decades of deferred maintenance, deterioration—including major water damage to Corinthian Hall—and neglect of preservation. In 2005, the City, Union Station Kansas City, and a newly formed nonprofit called the Kansas City Museum Advisory Board, began to work together to secure \$10 million in PIAC funding over seven years (2005-2012) for the following: roof restoration and exterior masonry repair to Corinthian Hall; demolition of non-original construction; restoration of major art glass in Corinthian Hall; window and door replacement in Corinthian Hall and the Carriage House to energy efficient and UV protection glass; and installation of HVAC system for Corinthian Hall and the Carriage House.

Recognizing the critical need for a comprehensive site-wide restoration and renovation plan, the City, Union Station Kansas City, and the Kansas City Museum Foundation (the Kansas City Museum Advisory Board changed its name in 2012) determined that it would be best for the Kansas City Museum to be operated and managed by the Parks and Recreation Department of Kansas City, Missouri, due to their vast experience with museums and cultural facilities (e.g. Starlight, Zoo, National WWI Museum and Memorial, Shoal Creek Living History Museum, Bruce R. Watkins Cultural Heritage Center, Black Archives of Mid-America).

In 2014, as the Parks Department took over the operation and management of the Kansas City Museum, the Kansas City Museum Foundation became the nonprofit partner organization to support the comprehensive site-wide, multi-staged, multi-year restoration and renovation project to create a 21st century museum of Kansas City's history and cultural heritage. Together, the City and the Kansas City Museum Foundation will build, advance, and sustain a leading-edge museum as well as a local and regional destination that will serve residents from the Greater Kansas City Metropolitan Area, along with thousands of visitors year-round.

In a national trend, local governments are moving from owner, operator, and sole funder, to owner and partner with 501(c)3 organizations. This move toward “public owner/private operator” partnerships has been seen in Kansas City, Missouri with organizations including the Kansas City Zoo and the National World War I Museum and Memorial, which have successfully transitioned from City-owned-and-operated organizations with supporting and advisory nonprofit boards, to City-owned assets operated by nonprofit partner organizations with governing boards. Therefore, the Kansas City Museum Foundation (see the attached Board List) is building its capacity as the nonprofit that will assume that operation and management of the Museum over time including ownership of buildings and collection materials. As stated in the Museum's 2016 Strategic Plan (see the attached Strategic Plan), “the [Kansas City Museum] Foundation Board has the potential, over time and by the completion of the renovation, to become the governing body of the Kansas City Museum empowered to operate and manage the Museum through a cooperative agreement with the Parks Department.”

Future of the Kansas City Museum

The Kansas City Museum is being restored and renovated to become a leading 21st century history museum with an educational and civic mission to preserve, interpret, and celebrate Kansas City. Through collections, exhibitions, and bold programs that reflect the City's evolution and spirit, the Museum will engage visitors in unfolding stories about Kansas City's vibrant history, cultural heritage, and pride. The vision of the Museum is to be a hub of learning, creativity, and collaboration where individuals and communities innovate and inspire engagement and civic unity.

The Kansas City Museum is one of the most historically significant, irreplaceable cultural and civic city assets that has been a part of the Kansas City community since 1940. Today it remains the only museum in Kansas City with the historical collection, capacity, and mission to share the rich multicultural history and stories of Kansas City and its people. Nearly 80 years after it opened to the public, the Museum can boast holdings of more than 100,000 historical artifacts and archival materials that document, interpret, and preserve Kansas City's local and regional history.

Thriving major cities across the country provide museums that share the histories of their cities (e.g. Chicago History Museum, Museum of the City of New York, San Francisco Museum and Historical Society, Albuquerque Museum, El Paseo Museum of History). In addition, as Kansas City's history Museum with a focus on inclusiveness and equity, the Kansas City Museum has the capacity to leverage the resilient and vibrant communities it serves.

The restored and renovated Kansas City Museum will provide the opportunity to present and showcase the materials from this vast and stellar collection through bold and innovative exhibitions, interactive digital technologies, and education and public programs exploring the past, present, and future of Kansas City. Through a multidisciplinary approach—blending history, architecture, and art—the Kansas City Museum will create an inclusive educational and civic environment where diverse individuals and communities come together to understand and appreciate Kansas City's past, present, and future. Content will be rich in its interpretation of the City's past, and relevant and responsive to contemporary interests, issues, and viewpoints. The Museum will embrace arts and culture as an important interpretive tool for learning about history. Academic research will be a high priority with quality access to collections, Museum staff, historians, educators, artists, and other scholars. Moreover, the Museum will be designated as the City's "residence" to accommodate official signature events and gatherings.

Visitors will experience the unfolding (and often untold) stories of Kansas City's evolution and spirit through activities that are multicultural, intergenerational, and multidimensional. Contextual narratives will be layered throughout the experience—in exhibitions, programs, events, amenities, and digital interactive technologies—to provide multiple points of entry into vibrant histories illuminated and interpreted by people from different backgrounds and perspectives. Like a palimpsest of Kansas City's history, the Museum will reveal visible and enduring traces of the past, as well as the promise and potential of what is to come.