

# Interpretive Plan

May 2010

City of Rogers Historical Museum Expansion



## Interpretive Plan Overview



**The lobby of the planned new facility, which will house all of the museum's collections storage areas and exhibit galleries.**

The Rogers Historical Museum is located in Northwest Arkansas, one of the nation's fastest growing metro areas. The population the museum serves is a diverse one. The 2000 census revealed that 13% of the area's population was Hispanic or Latino, 6% was foreign-born, and 10% spoke a language other than English (most often Spanish) at home, percentages that undoubtedly have since increased.

This interpretive plan was developed by the museum's staff under the leadership of the director, Dr. Gaye Bland. Museum staff visited other museums during the planning process, gathering ideas on interpretation and technology. Public input was gathered through an audience research project, as well as surveys at the museum and on the museum's website. The museum's Advisory Council also provided insights into audience needs and interests.

A committee of museum staff, commissioners, and audience representatives then finalized the list

of topics and themes to be addressed through the interpretive plan. This draft plan has been reviewed by humanities scholars, and those scholars and audience representatives will continue to be involved in the exhibition development process.

Audience input indicated that many area residents found local history to be most interesting and relevant if it were placed within a larger context and included a more contemporary perspective. Audience representatives also wanted more hands-on activities for children and a wider range of larger, more exciting traveling exhibits.

At the end of the planning process, a decision was made to divide the museum expansion's interpretive spaces into four parts: a permanent gallery with an orientation theater and five local history exhibitions, an entirely hands-on children's gallery, a collection's gallery, and a temporary exhibit gallery. The existing Hawkins House is also included in this plan.

## Permanent Exhibit Gallery

For much of its history Rogers was in many ways a typical small town in the American heartland. But while the emergence of a global economy has left so many similar communities struggling, Rogers and the other cities of Northwest Arkansas have thrived.

The exhibits in the permanent gallery will be united by the central theme of how area residents have displayed an entrepreneurial spirit that allowed them to maintain the area's economic vitality over time. The exhibits will

explore the people, places, events, and natural history that define the special character of this area, with collection objects serving as tangible links between present and past.

The museum will develop audiotours of the permanent gallery in English and Spanish. These tours and computer interactives will create a dynamic, engaging environment providing a depth of information beyond traditional labels, where visitors can explore as guided by their curiosity.

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*The Permanent Exhibit Gallery of the Rogers Historical Museum is envisioned as an immersive learning experience . . .*

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## Orientation Area

### Messages/Objectives:

- To provide a basic overview of area history and of the museum itself
- Conveniently located immediately behind the lobby of the museum

### Technology and Media:

- Orientation video – 12- to 15- minute overview of area history
- Wayfinding video – 1-minute introduction to galleries or special offerings, to immediately follow the orientation video
- Computer interactive – “Place Table,” with a regional map that allows visitors to explore various communities and areas in depth through a touch screen program, located nearby but physically separate from the theater



*This “Dialog Table” at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis is similar in concept to the planned “Place Table.”*

## Exhibit: Our Natural State

### Messages/Objectives:

- To illustrate how the geology, geography, weather, and natural resources of our region have affected the lives of people living in our area over time, and continue to affect our lives today
- To place our region within the regions of Arkansas, within the larger Ozarks, and within the regions of the central United States
- To introduce significant relevant topics such as the utilization of the bluff shelters along area rivers by American Indians, the lumber industry, local mining enterprises, and the silica and lime industries

### Themes Explored:

- How the land shapes people and people in turn shape the land
- How attitudes toward conservation of natural resources have changed over time
- How our area’s geographical location has affected regional identity and culture

### Collections:

- Fossil records, minerals, and Indian artifacts from the collections of the University of Arkansas Museum
- Artifacts including a family portrait, clothing, and a plank from an early kit house connected to mid-19th-century lumber baron Peter Van Winkle, who operated a state-of-the-art steam-powered lumber mill near Rogers

### Technology and Media:

- Exhibit panels
- Photographs and maps

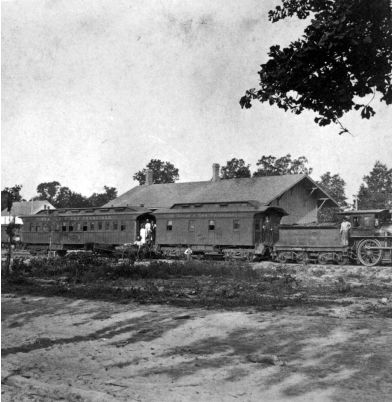
### Non-computer Interactives:

- Fossil touch shelf and mineral matching game
- Tornado machine
- Fully accessible bluff shelter area with atlatl throw hunting activity
- Working model steam engine like that used at the Van Winkle lumber mill
- Rooftop weather station



*This tornado machine represents the size and design of such a component suitable for the “Our Natural State” exhibit.*

## Exhibit: Road and Rail



*Rogers was born with the arrival of the St. Louis and San Francisco (Frisco) Railroad in 1881.*

### Messages/Objectives:

- To explore the impact of transportation on the area during the 19th and early 20th centuries
- To illustrate how the geography of the region and the developments in transportation influenced patterns of migration, and how those patterns contributed to the character of Northwest Arkansas
- To introduce significant topics in area history such as pioneer settlement, early craftsmen, the Trail of Tears, the Butterfield Overland Mail, the Civil War, the arrival of the Frisco Railroad, the birth of Rogers, and the town's early development as a center for the fruit industry

### Themes Explored:

- How clashes between competing cultures and belief systems affected Northwest Arkansas in the early 1800s and during the Civil War
- How patterns of migration changed over time in response to changes in transportation
- How those changing patterns of migration affected the ethnic, religious, and political makeup of the local population
- How the railroad connected the American heartland to the wider world, opening up markets for locally-produced agricultural goods and making mass-produced goods and professional entertainment more accessible
- How the story of Northwest Arkansas in the late 1800s fits into the larger story of the American westward movement, with such underlying themes as family separation, social dislocation, and economic mobility



*Revolver said to have been used by area resident Sam Burks during the Civil War.*

### Collections:

- Pioneer and Civil War era artifacts such as a locally made Green and Sager bedstead and quartermaster ledger from a local regiment
- Frisco Railroad items including the Hugh Crum collection of conductor uniforms, passenger book, rules book, ticket punch and various tickets, shipping receipts, original depot window and sign, and bricks
- Fruit industry artifacts such as an apple press, barrel, industrial apple peeler, apple picking bag, vinegar jars

### Technology and Media:

- Exhibit panels
- Photographs and maps
- Map of Trail of Tears route and/or pioneer route from Tennessee
- The 1910s silent film of Rogers playing in its entirety depicting scenes of everyday life, downtown buildings, homes, and transportation

## Exhibit: Road and Rail

Non-computer Interactives:

- Child-sized covered wagon with “pack your wagon to go West” activity
- Cherokee dress and language activity
- Re-creation of the Rogers depot with model train and role-playing activity

## Exhibit: America’s Heartland

Messages/Objectives:

- To explore how area citizens displayed a spirit of entrepreneurship and continued to seek the “good life” from the end of World War I into the 1950s
- To introduce significant individuals such as Betty Blake (Mrs. Will) Rogers, 1920s and 1930s pioneer aviator Louise Thaden, author Tom Morgan, and New Deal politician Clyde Ellis, one of the fathers of rural electrification
- To explore the birth and growth of the modern poultry industry and the impact of industrial recruitment after World War II
- To examine the qualities that came to differentiate Rogers and the other communities in our region from one another

Themes Explored:

- How World War I and the influenza pandemic contributed to a shift in social mores that was reflected in many ways, including dress and music
- How the coming of the Great Depression was foreshadowed in the economic problems faced by farmers in the 1920s
- How the government used propaganda to engender widespread support of the war effort during World War II
- How World War II affected the roles of women and the expectations of returning servicemen and women

Collections:

- Business records from the early and mid 1900s, with possible visible storage built into support columns for ledgers and boxes of archival documents, similar to columns in the Clinton Presidential Library in Little Rock
- Business artifacts including the Applegate Drug Store cash register, Garfield post office window, and partition walls from the Bank of Rogers
- Poultry industry artifacts such as an egg scale
- Artifacts relating to schools, churches, and social organizations such as high school year books and sports uniforms, and seals, ledgers, scrapbooks, and uniforms from organizations such as the Knights Templar
- Artifacts relating to the mid-1920s Apple Blossom Festivals such as a crown and event programs
- Objects relating to people, including Betty Blake Rogers’ mandolin and suitcase, Tom Morgan’s desk and chair, and Louise Thaden’s first pilot’s license



*Children relive the crowning of the Apple Blossom Queen on a re-creation of the throne used at the Apple Blossom Festivals of the 1920s.*

## Exhibit: America's Heartland

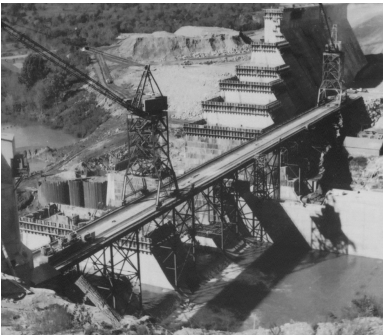
### Technology and Media:

- Interactive portrait wall
- Exhibit panels
- Photographs and maps
- The film *America's Heartland* playing in its entirety
- Oral history listening stations

### Non-computer interactives:

- Apple Blossom Festival hands-on throne
- Walk-in store fronts
- Drive-a-car activity

## Exhibit: White River



**Beaver Dam under construction in 1962.**

### Messages/Objectives:

- To explore the role of the White River in the economic and social life of our region
- To examine the growth of tourism centered around the White River, including the resort of Monte Ne in the early 1900s and organized float fishing in the mid 1900s
- To explain the reasons for the building of Beaver Dam
- To explore the impact of Beaver Dam on both individual lives and regional development

### Themes Explored:

- How the White River and its tributaries allowed Northwest Arkansas to participate in the tourism industry at a time when leisure travel was becoming more important in America
- How one of America's greatest natural disasters, the Mississippi Valley flood of 1927, led to the initial planning for Beaver Dam
- How area citizens worked to secure the dam's funding
- How the building of Beaver Dam brought social and economic change to Northwest Arkansas

### Collections:

- General farming, hunting, and fishing artifacts including a johnboat recreation, traps, a frog gig, and tools such as a scythe, plow, hand planter, and hay fork
- Personal and household belongings of Larue/White River area families such as friendship quilts and a family Bible
- "Coin" Harvey and Monte Ne artifacts including Harvey's death mask, books, correspondence, and Liberty Party memorabilia

## Exhibit: White River

### Technology and Media:

- Monte Ne video
- Exhibit panels
- Photographs and maps

### Non-computer interactives:

- Flooding valley model
- Hydroelectric power demonstration
- Area where visitors can pose with life-sized images of “Coin” Harvey and William Jennings Bryan who were leaders in the Free Silver movement

## Exhibit: Our Place

### Messages/Objectives:

- To illustrate how the economic changes since World War II affected Rogers and all of Northwest Arkansas
- To explore the challenges of growth
- To encourage visitors to think about the region’s future in a changing world

### Themes Explored:

- How changes in communication and transportation allowed huge corporations such as Wal-Mart and Tyson Foods to develop in Northwest Arkansas
- How economic growth has changed the ethnic and religious composition of Northwest Arkansas, leading to both increased cultural richness and cultural conflict

### Collections:

- Recent business artifacts including receipts and ledgers, business promotional items such as match books, pens, yard sticks, etc., Daisy BB guns and related products
- Recent community artifacts such as posters for multicultural events, school yearbooks and memorabilia, Frisco Festival memorabilia, and club scrapbooks

### Technology and Media:

- Exhibit panels
- Interactive area where visitors can express their thoughts on the challenges that face our region now and in the future



*Awaiting the opening of Wal-Mart #1 in Rogers, 1962.*

## Hands-On History Children's Gallery



*The planned hands-on gallery will offer far more space than the current "Attic" exhibit.*

The children's gallery will encourage role-playing as youngsters move back and forth from one area to another, purchasing groceries to take home or gathering eggs to trade for goods. The corner market will help develop basic skills as youngsters weigh and measure as they buy (or barter) and sell.

A building area will allow younger children to develop their motor skills as they stack foam blocks. Meanwhile older siblings can use vintage tools or assemble a model of a timber-frame structure. Just for fun youngsters can go down a tube slide modeled on an old-fashioned school fire escape.

Messages/Objectives:

- To provide an interactive history exploration area for children ages 2 to 9
- To provide an area where teen volunteers can serve the community

Non-computer interactives:

- Grandpa's shop
- Grandma's house
- Corner market
- Tube slide modeled on the fire escape at the old Rogers High School

## Permanent Collections Gallery



*Salts from the Agnes Lytton Reagan collection; these small glass containers from which diners spooned salt illustrate the manners and customs of an earlier time.*

The collections gallery with acrylic-covered metal shelving and drawer units will give visitors the sense that they have walked into collections storage. Some items will be on permanent display, but sensitive

objects such as textiles will be rotated quarterly. A window will provide a view into one of the museum's actual storage areas, and visitors will occasionally be able to view staff members at work.

Messages/Objectives:

- To illustrate the wide range of objects in the museum's permanent collection
- To provide visitors regular access to certain highly popular groups of objects
- To illustrate the ways the museum cares for the objects in its trust

Collections:

- A selection of items typical of the objects in the permanent collection
- An "open storage" permanent exhibition of selected groups of objects such as the Roy Harris folk art woodcarvings and the Agnes Lytton Reagan salts

Technology and Media:

- Exhibit panels
- Photographs
- Interactive computer kiosk where visitors can explore selected groups of objects from the collection



## Temporary (Traveling) Exhibit Gallery

The Temporary (Traveling) Exhibit Gallery will enhance the museum's active exhibit program by offering a venue for special museum installations and nationally known traveling exhibits. Many of the traveling exhibits currently available for display, and supportive of the museum's mission, require 1,200 to 2,000 square feet of display space.

It is an institutional goal to host high-profile exhibits related to topics of local interest such as the Civil War, frontier life, or recreation. The museum also plans to host traveling exhibits that provide cultural outreach to newcomers to Rogers. Loan exhibits will generally be augmented

with local objects and images. Envisioned as offering about 2,000 square feet of floor space, the gallery will accommodate not only large exhibit components, but also feature the ability to subdivide gallery space for simultaneous, smaller displays or program use.

The physical space of the gallery will require flexibility in lighting systems, wall display units, and points of access to communications and information networks. This flexible space will be adaptable in accommodating the display needs of varied exhibits and will be able to incorporate interactive media to enhance the visitor experience.

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*The Temporary (Traveling) Exhibit Gallery will enhance the museum's active exhibit program by offering a venue for special museum installations and nationally known traveling exhibits.*

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## Examples of Potential Traveling Loan Exhibits

### ExhibitsUSA

- *Mobile Mansions*  
A history of recreational vehicles
- *Lee and Grant* \*  
The Civil War leaders and how they have been viewed over time
- *Going Places* \*  
A history of horse-drawn transportation
- *Carnaval* \*  
A history of the carnival season that ends Lent in Europe and America
- *Farm Life* \*  
A look at a century of social and cultural change on the farm

### Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibit Service

- *Our Journeys/Our Stories*  
A history of Latino achievement in the United States
- *Forget Me Not*  
The story of women and the American landscape
- *Bittersweet Harvest: The Bracero Program, 1942-1964*  
A study of experiences of the Mexican Agricultural Labor Program

\* From the NEH on the Road exhibition program funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities



*The traveling version of "Going Places," shown here on display at the Long Island Museum of American Art, History, and Carriages, is one example of the exciting traveling exhibits the museum could host in an expanded facility.*



**The kitchen in the 1895 Hawkins House.**

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*This immersive experience creates the sense that the Hawkins family just stepped out of the house for a moment and the visitor is a guest in their home.*

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**Schoolchildren will continue to visit the Hawkins House accompanied by museum educators.**

## The Hawkins House

The 1895 Hawkins House will continue to be a distinct, permanent exhibit as part of the Rogers Historical Museum visitor experience. The house presents a glimpse of how a middle-class family lived in small-town Arkansas at the turn of the 20th century. Visitors learn about everyday life in the first decades of the 20th century through guided tours of the home's six period rooms.

In the Hawkins House, visitors are surrounded by the furnishings, tools, clothing, foods, toys, and other objects of the early 20th century as they would have been arranged and used. This

immersive experience creates the sense that the Hawkins family just stepped out of the house for a moment and the visitor is a guest in their home. At the end of the tour, a basket of hands-on reproductions lets visitors touch and use some of the objects they have seen in the house, including a stereoscope.

Museum guides offer insights into the objects on display and provide the opportunity for visitors to freely ask questions based on their curiosity about unfamiliar objects or family relationships. Humanities themes such as the changing nature of childhood,

## Programming

The museum will offer a wide variety of programs for all ages in the planned new facility. In addition, volunteer gallery guides in the permanent exhibits will engage visitors and help them take advantage of the various interactive components. In the hands-on children's gallery, younger teens will serve as gallery guides.

School programming will continue to be central to the museum's mission. The Hawkins House and the planned permanent exhibits address a number of humanities themes incorporated into the Arkansas Curriculum Frameworks including: the concepts of change over time; the use of artifacts, photos, maps, and documents to understand the past; technology and change; and changes in families and communities over time.

In addition the planned permanent exhibits deal directly with a wide variety of topics taught in local schools. These include: the natural resources of Arkansas; the regions of Arkansas; interactions between people and the environment; changes in transportation; Indians of Arkansas; rocks, minerals, and fossils; and the Trail of Tears.

Near the exhibits will be a small seating area where museum educators or teachers can gather students for instruction or orientation before or after they tour the exhibits. A large auditorium with full audiovisual capabilities will also be available near the galleries. The current Key Wing will house a generous classroom and activity area.

## An Overview of the Expansion

### Where will the new facility be built?

The lots directly to the west of the current main facility going along Cherry to Third Street, and the lots along Third north to Poplar.

### How large will the new facility be?

27,000 square feet on two levels.

### What will be in the new facility?

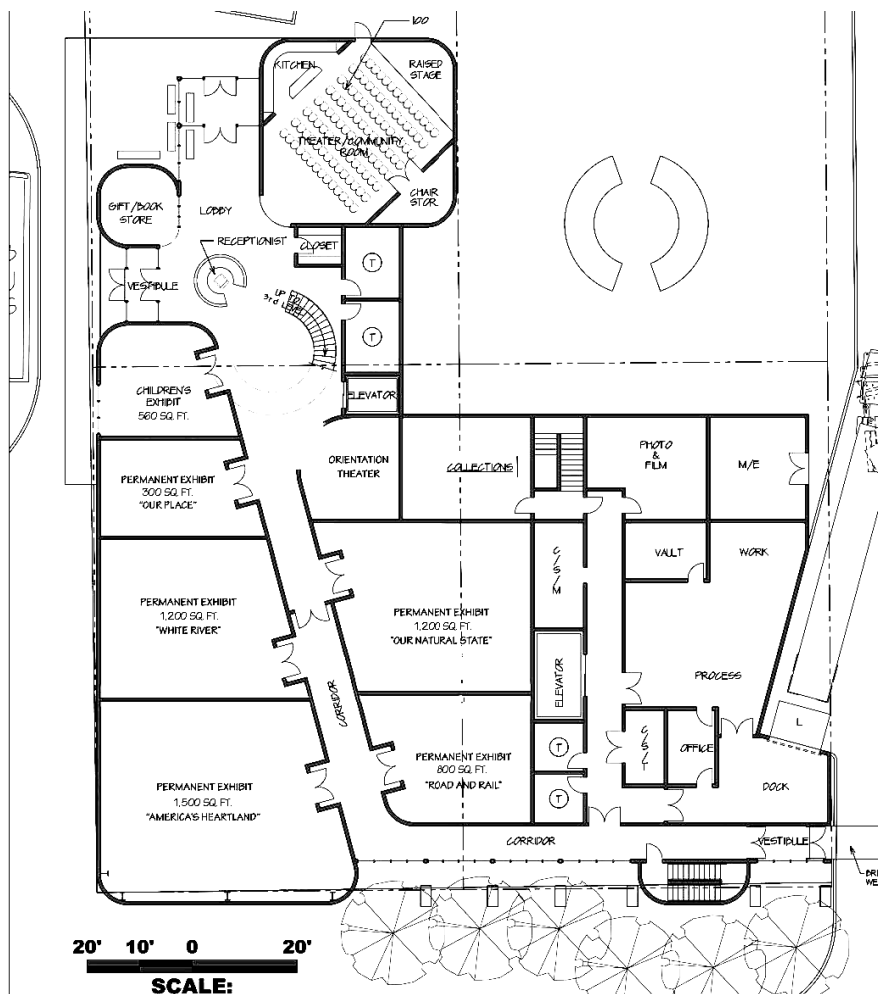
- Exhibit galleries totaling 8,100 square feet
- Collections storage and work areas that will more than double our current collections storage space
- Auditorium that will seat 100
- Generous lobby, restrooms, and museum shop
- Offices, research library, conference room, staff break and work rooms
- Exhibit prop storage, elevators, mechanical rooms

### How will the current main facility, the Key Wing, be used?

The primary use of the current main facility will be for education offices and generous classroom space. The building also will house teaching collection and other storage, as well as a large exhibit building shop.

### Why is this expansion needed?

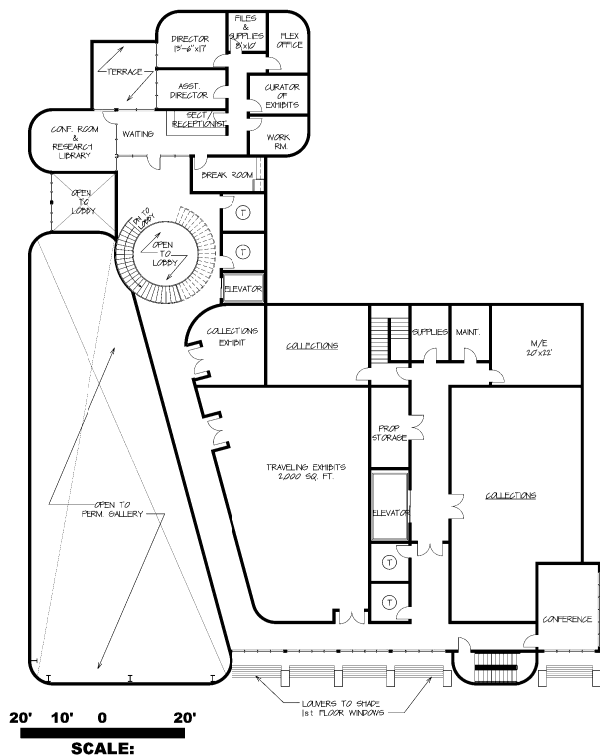
- A growing, changing population with increasing expectations for exhibits
- A growing collection
- Growing, changing school districts with new expectations for museum programming
- Increasing tourism potential for the museum and our historic downtown



*The first floor plan and the view east along the south hallway of the planned new facility.*

Rogers Historical Museum  
322 South Second Street  
Rogers AR 72756

## An Overview of the Expansion



*The second floor plan and the entry façade of the planned new facility.*