


10-2004

# Plan for Change: Kentucky Library and Museum

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## Recommended Citation

Mullin, Timothy, "Plan for Change: Kentucky Library and Museum" (2004). *Library Annual Reports, Reports, and Statistics*. Paper 5. <http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/ulstats/5>

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Plan for Change  
Kentucky Library and Museum  
10/04

To create a dynamic, exciting library and museum, which will be an asset to both Western Kentucky University and the community at large, a number of changes in our normal operations need to take place. The problems are each addressed below; storage, new gallery space, new exhibits, and new operating procedures to better meet the needs of the community and the campus. This plan will address each aspect of the anticipated changes, and set some priorities. All changes described will be consistent with the strategic plans of the University Libraries and Western Kentucky University.

Our Mission Statement

Our mission statement, **‘The Kentucky Library and Museum of Western Kentucky University, exists to enhance the understanding of Kentucky and its people’** and our tag line, **‘we collect Kentucky’** should drive our functions, our exhibits, our programs, our collecting, and our goals.

Audience

We live in an experience economy. Every other service industry competes with us to offer a memorable experience to its clients. Other museums, movie theatres, restaurants, the mall all compete for the consumer’s time and dollars. We must provide something that not only attracts our audience, but gives them a pleasant experience they can not get at another location. Look at the success of Lost River Cave, a butterfly habitat, boat tours on a river in a cave...these are unique experiences for the visitor and subsequently keep their visitation numbers high.

One of the most important tasks for any institution is to identify the audience for whom they are programming. Even the best planned

business will fail if pitched to the wrong audience.

Our audience falls into several distinct groups, each requiring different approaches... they are....

1. **Campus**; faculty, staff, students
2. **Community**; Bowling Green, Warren County and surrounding communities within 50 miles
3. **Schools**; all schools within 50 miles
4. **Tour groups**; people on bus tours from far away

Each of these audiences expects, wants, and needs different services.

The **Campus** depends on the resources and information components of our library, manuscript, and archive collection areas. The exposure to primary materials and historic documents should be an important part of every student's university experience, and this is the only place where they can get that experience on the WKU campus. These areas need to be freely accessible, inviting and comfortable in order to create the best atmosphere for study and discovery.

The museum area must also serve the Campus by developing exhibits to meet the interest level of the students. Part of every student's experience should be discovering that museums can be enjoyable and add to their understanding of life. The campus has new students every year, and every four years the student body turns over completely. An old exhibit is just as fresh and new to a student who has never seen it. Exhibit topics meaningful to students should always be included in our galleries.

- **We should make every effort to make the Kentucky Building welcoming and easily accessible to everyone, especially students.**
- **We should always have a portion of our museum dedicated to exhibits about WKU.** As the WKU Welcome Center, we offer most visitors their first impression of the campus, their first contact with the University. Dynamic, changing exhibits

about WKU would provide visitors a picture of our exciting campus, and students and staff alike might gain a sense of pride, an infusion of spirit, and a feeling of belonging

The **Community**, those 250,000 people who live within an easy drive of our museum, has different needs. It will not come to the same museum and see the same thing over and over again. In fact, those community people who have had that experience go away with a negative impression. There is no attendance model which shows the community coming to a history museum more often than once a year and then generally for a special event.

- **We need to have prominent changing exhibit space, which changes annually.** Dramatic, fun exhibits which are replaced every year and have major openings can attract the community.
- **We need to provide a space in the Kentucky Library and Museum for special activities to take place.** This is an important way to attract the community, and a major method of having the community 'buy in' to the museum. By becoming a part of the lives of the community, a place where receptions, weddings, parties, graduations, and similar activities take place, we can create a sense of belonging to the community.
- **We must appeal to families with small children.** Another significant source of visitation is parents with small children, and home-schoolers. By providing programs directed at this audience we can attract this important sector of the community.

The **Schools** are the bread and butter of any museum. They account for the largest portion of visitation and often the largest number of sales in the gift shop (unless there is a healthy tour bus business). Schools will bring their students each year, if meaningful programs are in place.

- **We must offer meaningful, curriculum-based, grade-specific programs at the convenience of the schools.** Our school programs should be a natural extension of the school curriculum,

designed to meet the KERA standards set by the Commonwealth. Our programs should be viewed as a necessary addition to classroom learning, and not be perceived as fun extra-curricular activity.

The **Tour Bus** industry is booming and is already coming to our area. We must create and market exhibits with national appeal, which hook the tour bus operators. The actual person on the bus will only visit once, but the tour operator (if they hear good things about our museum) can send us several buses a day! The exhibits must be good quality, and we also must offer quantity, by way of enjoyable gallery exhibits, so our site seems worthy of being a destination. By providing a worthy site, tour operators can send us admission-paying, gift-shopping visitors by the bus load.

- **We need to jump at the opportunity to install an exhibit about Duncan Hines, nation-wide name recognition we couldn't afford to buy.** The Duncan Hines exhibit should be installed in a prominent location in the galleries.
- **We need to have a decorative arts gallery.** As we are the only spot in our region with a decorative arts collection, we should always have fine and decorative arts on display, showing our most significant pieces.
- **We need a quilt gallery.** Quilts are one of our collection strengths, they remain very popular, and we should have them on permanent display.

## **Opportunities for Change**

If the museum is going to meet the challenge of developing its potential audience, there are a number of steps it must take. Without taking these steps, the Kentucky Library and Museum can not move forward.

These opportunities are in priority order.

## **1. Off-site Storage.**

A number of reports<sup>1</sup> have stated the desperate need for additional storage. Fifteen year old plans include an addition that was never built. The problem has only become worse. We are now in a situation where we turn down donations for lack of a place to store them. We have turned prime exhibit galleries into storage areas for lack of a place to keep our collections.

All other directions for growth are hinged on having adequate storage outside of our current building. By moving storage out, we can take back gallery space, make use of our elevator (which is currently not available to the public, in a four story building) *and* make our building more handicapped accessible.

- **Action #1.** Rent an off site storage facility until a proprietary building can be built.
  - 1a. Build a new building, 15,000 sq.ft. fit with equipment ~ \$3,750,000. (about \$250. per sq. ft.)
  - 1b. Buy an old building and convert ~ \$1,500,000. (about \$100. per sq.ft.)
  - 1c. Rent finished space, add shelving ~ \$60,000. annually (about \$4. per sq.ft.), plus equipment , \$250,000. (one time expense)

## **2. Create a Permanent Exhibit with National Name Recognition, and Improve our Gallery Offerings.**

### *Tour Bus Industry/Community*

In order to attract the tour bus industry, we must appeal to the tour operator, a person who sits in an office in Wichita or Muskogee. Our exhibit title has to hook that person, who will be selling a tour to

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<sup>1</sup> Museum Assessment Program II, Survey Report, 1990, Rodger E. Stroup, Director of Collections, South Carolina State Museum, for the Institute for Museum and Library Services.

Conservation Assessment Program, Survey Report, 1992, Shelley Reisman, Nashville, for the Institute for Museum and Library Services.

An Analysis of the Kentucky Library and Museum, 2001, James Klotter, Kentucky State Historian.

The Kentucky Museum, 2003, Nancy Disher Baird, Interim Department Head.

Bowling Green. Bus tours come to BG to see the Corvette Museum and Lost River Cave...and we must offer something equally exciting. An exhibit on Duncan Hines... an exhibit with national name recognition, which sounds like fun, would be our ticket

Also, our museum must present enough good exhibits and gallery spaces, appealing to the various interests of bus tour clients, so that a stop here seems worthy of their time. When the people go back and tell the tour operator that they had a good time...that operator will continue to sell visits to our museum.

- **Action #2.** Partner with Bowling Green Convention and Visitors Bureau to develop an exhibit on Duncan Hines to go in the main gallery. This would share space now taken by Growing Up Victorian.
  - 2a. design firm, 1000sq.ft. ~ \$250,000.
  - 2b. combo design firm/ in-house, less exciting, same space ~ \$100,000.
  - 2c. in-house, same space ~ \$50,000.

## **2½. Re-visit Growing Up Victorian.**

### *Campus/ Community/Schools/ Tour Buses*

While this exhibit, installed in 1985 and the recipient of a national award for excellence in design, is still in place, many people in the community and campus have tired of looking at it. People on tour buses, however, have never seen it before and it remains fresh for first and only time visitors. To make better use of our precious exhibit space, this exhibit can be re-designed to occupy a smaller footprint, and be re-invigorated at the same time. A fresh look at the parlors and new image and object placement can be breath new life into this award-winning exhibit.

The large photo images on black plastic can be re-formatted to appear on a computer screen, taking up far less space. Themes can be solidified, more attention can be paid to growing up male, and sections can be deliberately designed to augment our school programs.

- **Action #2½.** Re-install Growing Up Victorian, sizing it down from ~2,500 sq.ft to 1,500 sq. ft. updating information, and adding

newer technology. ~ \$50,000.

### **3. Develop the Kentucky Room.**

*Campus/Community.*

Providing the public with a space to hold events, weddings, receptions and dinners would not only provide a source of revenue, but create a sense of belonging to the museum. The Kentucky Room is now used as gallery space, which often precludes functions, and as free space for University dinners. The Kentucky Room should retain its gallery function, but it should be limited to being an art gallery, with pictures hung specially to blend with the space, leaving the floor space open for rental purposes.

- **Action #3.** Form a partnership with WKU's Division of Extended Learning and Outreach to make necessary improvements to the Kentucky Room and its facilities.

3a. new carpet ~ \$10,000.

3b. relocate chandeliers, and add new track lighting ~\$5,000.

3c. fresh paint ~ \$1,000.

3d. renovate bathrooms near Kentucky Room for easy access ~ \$2,000.

3e. upgrade kitchen facilities for easier catering ~ \$2,000.

3f. consider changes to Manuscript reading room to better accommodate wheelchair access to

Kentucky Room (see below)

3g. attach panic bars to all three front doors to make them usable fire exits

3h. assure that plans for the continued improvements to HVAC system remain on the books

### **4. Orientation Room Display.**

*Campus / Community.*

Always keep a WKU exhibit in the Orientation Room. Build attractive exhibit cases so the room has a unified look, and WKU objects



can always be on display. It is the first space a visitor sees in the University's museum and should contain exhibits pertaining to the University. While exhibits may rotate, they should all focus on WKU. This gallery should be the purview of University Archives.

Moving the WKU Centennial exhibit to this space, once its run in the main galley is finished should be considered.

- **Action #4.** Build some attractive, lighted cases in the orientation room for changing exhibits which focus on WKU.

4a. Construction costs.....~ \$5,000.

## **5. Create a Children's Museum.**

*Community.*

Develop a space in which small children can play with old-time things. An old fashioned store, a classroom where they might play teacher with a black board to draw on, an old-time kitchen, a puppet theatre, dress-up in grandma's attic....that type of thing. This space would be open to all visitors whenever the museum is open, and available for birthday parties with ice cream and cake in the Activities room on the weekends (when those spaces are not in use for programs). Children's birthday parties are an additional source of revenue.

- **Action #5.** Develop a holding of non-collection objects which are old, different from the plastic world of computers that children now know (dial telephones, punch-key typewriters, and manual adding machines...this sort of thing). Create a play area in which these old-time things can be used.

5a. Convert E103, the archeological storage room at the far end of the first floor hall. ~ \$5,000.

## **6. Develop Curriculum-based school programs.**

*Schools/ Community.*

School programs must be focused and grade- specific in order to be of value to the schools. We must develop programs that address state standards and clearly state which KERA standards our programs meet. We must offer something which enriches the classroom experience by offering something the classroom can not; real historic

objects which help to illustrate the goal of the lesson. We must develop programs which dovetail directly with the curriculum at each grade level, k-6. These programs must be offered at the convenience of the schools. Following these guidelines, we can increase the number of school children who use our museum.

- **Action #6.** Partner with the Education Department and our own teacher/advisors, to develop some top notch hands-on school programs. Each program should include an element of examination of real artifacts, and a crafts project so they take something home with them.

6a. Create a teaching/guide corps, hire guides, use elementary ed. student teachers (perhaps they could get credit), and develop a cadre of dedicated volunteers

## **7. Develop the Felts Log House.**

*Campus/ Community/ Schools/ Tour Buses*

One unique feature we have to offer tour buses, school children, and our own students is the Felts Log House. This building could be a study tool for museum, folklife, landscape design, engineering, and agricultural classes. It would be an opportunity for bus visitors to see a log house without traveling a greater distance. Where better to teach school children about pioneer life than in this early log house?

- **Action #7.** Develop a period landscape around the log house, reinterpret the interiors to better display a focus time period, and train guides to give tours to the public.

7a. Landscape ~ \$20,000.

7b. Re-interpret interiors ~ \$25,000.

7c. Train guides (staff effort only)

Consider creating an audio tour for visitors and children alike which can include music, different first-person voices, an array of information for the visitor to pick and choose about architecture, folkways, crop production, with appropriate noises. ~ \$25,000. plus scripting and writing which could be a student project.

## **8. Create More Galleries with Wide Appeal.**

### *Tour Bus/ Community*

This is predicated on developing off-site storage. Meeting the demand of the tour bus industry, our museum must offer a large enough program to be worthwhile. We must present ourselves as a destination. We must offer enough entertainment value to hold bus clients interest for a long enough period of time. We need a large permanent exhibit on our region, we need a decorative arts gallery to show case our beautiful furniture. We need a gallery for glass, silver, toys. If our collections will not support an entire gallery, we need to devote half of a gallery to toys and dolls, a quarter to clothing, and another quarter to political memorabilia. We should very definitely have a quilt room, since quilts are a major collecting area, and quilts continue to be a favorite of museum goers.

- **Action #8** Reorganize gallery space for permanent displays of our collection strengths...quilts, decorative arts, and archeological specimens. Develop a permanent exhibit on the Green River Valley which would incorporate many of our objects, a sort of mini-history of South Central Kentucky.

8a. Green River Exhibit, ~ 3000 sq.ft. ~ \$600,000. -  
this can be on the third floor, 315-317

8b. Decorative Arts gallery ~ 1000 sq.ft. ~ \$3,000. –  
this can go in E300

8c. Quilt Gallery ~ 1000 sq.ft. ~ \$5,000. – this can go  
in E301

8d. Toy and Doll Gallery ~ 800 sq.ft. ~ \$2,000. – this  
could go in E303

## **9. Give the public elevator access to G, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> floors (3<sup>rd</sup> floor when off-site storage is accomplished) .**

### *Campus/ Community/ Tour Buses*

Access is one of the main problems with our building. When the architects designed the elevator in the middle of the gallery rather than in the lobby area, problems with access were bound to happen. Locking off the elevator, restricting public access, is unacceptable in a

service-oriented building, not to mention the possible legal ramifications regarding service for the disabled.

- **Action #9.** Change the elevator to buttons instead of keys for all but the third floor (for now). Handicapped people, the disabled, the elderly may all enjoy the dignity of deciding when and where they might like to go in our building without requiring the humiliation of requesting an assistant.

9a. Change the elevator from keys to buttons  
(cost to be determined)

## **10. Consider changes to the Manuscripts and Library Reading Rooms.**

*Campus/ Community/ Tour Buses*

This is a continuation of the access problem mentioned in #9. Access to the Kentucky Room and Jackson Gallery, is equally difficult for the handicapped, disabled, and elderly, currently requiring an assistant to escort a visitor through several locked doors and offices.

Creating a ‘passage’ using a tile floor, in essence a path to follow from the elevator through the library and manuscripts, may help guests and visitors move more comfortably from the Kentucky Room to the elevator, unescorted.

- **Action #10.** Create a tiled path from the elevator through the library and manuscripts.
  - 10a. Create tile passageway
  - 10b. Re-carpet both Library and Manuscripts ~ \$12,000 for both

## **11. Locate an Aramark-style cafe in the Garden Gallery.**

*Campus/ Community/ Bus Tours*

This gallery is not often used for exhibits because the light from the windows is damaging. Clients often ask where they can get a cup of coffee or a bite to eat without getting in their car. To offer clients a small cafe in this space, with access to the beautiful courtyard, would make this building a more attractive, warm, welcoming space to any visitor.

- **Action #11.** Contract with Aramark to set up a cafe in the Garden Gallery.
  - 11a. Replace metal courtyard doors with glass doors ~\$3,000.
  - 11b. Make the courtyard accessible from all entrances
  - 11c. Get new outdoor furniture ~\$1,000
  - 11d. Plant the courtyard to be more attractive (cost TBD)

## 12. Galleries M, N, O.

### *Campus/ Community/ Tour Buses*

Handicapped access to this beautiful space is currently not a useable solution; an old chair lift that is chained and impossible to work. When a storage building allows the third floor (315, 316, 317, 318, 319), E300, and E301 to be used as gallery space, a new ramp or lift of some sort can be designed to allow the handicapped, the disabled, and the elderly to enjoy the exhibits in M(E302),N(E303),&O(E304) in comfort, under their own power, and eliminating the humiliation of requiring an assistant.

- **Action #12.** Design a ramp/lift as part of the re-conversion of the third floor into gallery space, which allows for handicapped access to Galleries M, N, &O. (cost TBD)

## 13. Gallery space for museum students.

### *Campus/Community*

As the University Museum we should do all we can to promote the study of museology and the arts. Classes in exhibit design need space for student expression, trials, and gaining experience. Students in fine arts need space for their expressions. While there is a gallery in FAC for the display of classroom projects, there should also be space in the Kentucky Building for a more public display of University students' achievements.

- **Action #13.** Make gallery space available to other departments for display of student work and student-designed exhibits. This could be in E302 or E304.

(no costs would be associated with this)

#### **14. Changing Exhibits in Gallery A.**

##### *Community.*

The public's first glance into our gallery space should *always* be of our most recent, our most frequently changed exhibit. When the Community walks into our space their first impression should be "something new," rather than "same old thing." Exhibits that stay up for years, or exhibit walls that don't move from one decade to the next are not desirable and suggest a museum where nothing changes.

The exhibits should deal with the community, perhaps done in partnership with community organizations, celebrating community anniversaries, or focusing on particular community groups.

- **Action #14.** Following the WKU Centennial exhibit, place one new changing exhibit in Gallery A each year. Also, our exhibits should be designed to walk through rather than providing a way to walk around.

14a. One changing exhibit per year would allow several sponsors to support one quality exhibit, rather than three or four relatively minor exhibits.