

Freedom's Frontier

NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA



FISCAL YEAR
2024
ANNUAL REPORT



What is Freedom's Frontier?

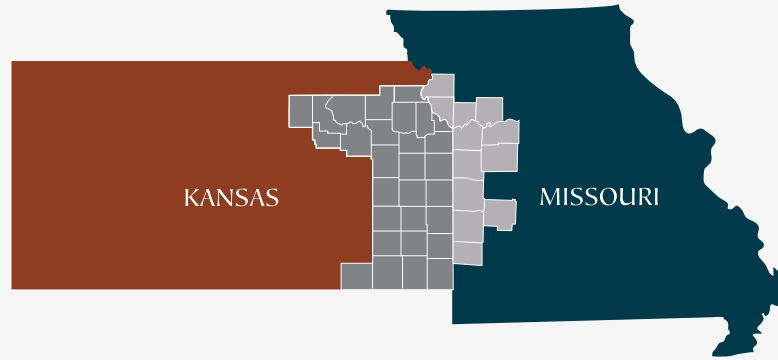
If you live along the Missouri-Kansas border, how you tell the story of freedom often depends on where you call home.

Along this border, a new nation set out in a long trek across the ancestral lands of Native Americans to settle the frontier and, in the process, hoped to find economic and religious freedom.

Along this border, the nation violently collided in skirmishes that helped instigate the Civil War.

Along this border, millions of Americans fought—over school segregation, over Native-American rights, over suffrage, over the right to choose how to live and love—in the enduring struggle for freedom.

Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area brings together the histories that started here but grew to change the course of history for the entire country, whether it is the history of the settlement of the frontier, the Kansas-Missouri Border War and Civil War, or the enduring struggle for freedom.



Freedom's Frontier knits together the histories of the settlement of the frontier, the Border War and Civil War, and the enduring struggle for freedom into one American fabric. Its threads contain the remarkable histories from its partners: historical sites, museums, convention and visitor bureaus, educators, and support societies. Each is deeply invested in telling these stories.

More than three million people call Freedom's Frontier home. More than 30,000 square miles fall in the 41 counties that define Freedom's Frontier in both Missouri and Kansas. As we end our eighteenth year of operation, over 250 organizations have partnered with us.

KANSAS: Allen · Anderson · Atchison · Bourbon · Chautauqua · Cherokee · Clay · Coffey · Crawford · Douglas · Franklin · Geary · Jackson · Jefferson · Johnson · Labette · Leavenworth · Linn · Miami · Montgomery · Neosho · Osage · Pottawatomie · Riley · Shawnee · Wabaunsee · Wilson · Woodson · Wyandotte

MISSOURI: Barton · Bates · Buchanan · Cass · Clay · Jackson · Johnson · Lafayette · Platte · Ray · St. Clair · Vernon

On the cover: The Gem Theater in Kansas City's 18th & Vine district.
Left: A statue of President Truman stands at the Harry S. Truman Presidential Library & Museum in Independence, MO.



A Message from Gary Nevius Trustee Chair, 2024

It is my honor to reflect on Freedom's Frontier in 2024—a year defined by progress. Together, we have navigated challenges, met uncertain circumstances, and emerged more committed than ever to promoting economic development, tourism, and the stories that make this region unique.

Over the last twelve months, we have reestablished our educational programming, redeveloped our website, and relaunched our public events. Our grants and digital tours reach more people today than ever before. These successes are a testament to the dedication of our staff, the passion of our volunteers, and the generosity of our donors and partners.

Equally important are the stories behind the numbers. In August, I was proud to host *Casualties of War: A Civil War on the Western Border Symposium* at Truman Library. Watching attendees absorb each lecture, I was struck by the resonance of these stories 150 years on. Their urgency reminds us of the truism that history repeats itself. But even more, that it is the most accurate guidepost we have on our way to making the future a better place.

On the eve of our nation's 250th anniversary, these lessons couldn't be more important. Nor has Freedom's Frontier and its mission been more vital. We look forward to the difficulties and opportunities that await.

Of course, none of this would be possible without you. Whether you have contributed time, resources, expertise, or advocacy, your support has been the driving force behind our achievements. On behalf of the entire Board of Trustees, thank you for believing in our vision and for standing with us every step of the way. I am proud to be on this journey with you.

With gratitude and hope,

Gary Nevius

Leading the Charge

At the end of 2024, FFNHA is finally flourishing. Freed from the limitations of the pandemic era, we find ourselves stronger than ever as we march unwaveringly toward building tourism and economic development in Kansas and Missouri. Our dedicated team—in collaboration with our valued partners and supporters—has demonstrated that it embodies the best of small-town America and this region’s indomitable spirit, harnessing its resilience and adaptability as we commit to making our communities better places to live and work.

Some of our key achievements included:

- Securing 1,146 volunteer hours valuing nearly \$35,000
- Serving 273% more students through Bus on Us grants versus 2023
- Supporting non-educational programming that reached more than 28,000 people
- Building a self-sustaining web-based portal that hosts 20 interactive tours of the region with over 1,000 hits
- Hosting *Casualties of War: A Civil War on the Western Border Symposium* at the Harry S. Truman Presidential Library & Museum

None of our accomplishments would be possible without the unwavering support of our donors, partners, volunteers, and dedicated team members. Your belief in our mission fuels our determination to create positive change and empowers us to reach new heights.

We look forward to the future and the inevitable obstacles ahead. Throughout, we will remain steadfastly committed to innovation, collaboration, and continuous improvement as we promote our region’s unique history and heritage.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to each of you for being an essential part of Freedom’s Frontier. Your belief in our mandate and our mission propels us forward as we continue to preserve the stories of our past.

- Lucinda Adams, Executive Director



Preserving History & Protecting Rights

Each region’s history is unique. When President George W. Bush signed into law the act creating Freedom’s Frontier National Heritage Area in 2006, it capped a years-long, grassroots effort from Kansas and Missouri volunteers to nationally memorialize this region’s history. In the years since, similar efforts have gained traction across the country. In 2019, President Donald Trump created six new national heritage areas that now sit alongside FFNHA as part of the National Heritage Area program.

Established under President Ronald Reagan, the program was envisioned as an alternative to the National Park Service, one that would preserve history and private property rights at the same time. There are now 62 heritage areas from coast to coast, and just as each region’s history is unique, the laws that establish and govern each heritage area are distinct.

The law that created Freedom’s Frontier is black and white. It states that no land or organization is automatically “opted in” as a part of Freedom’s Frontier. By law, no private property owner is required to participate in or be associated with Freedom’s Frontier, nor can Freedom’s Frontier own real estate or property. We have no influence over zoning or land-use regulations and no authority over mineral or water rights. Any entity or organization who partners with Freedom’s Frontier must be within our congressionally designated borders; even then, we cannot require any entity or organization to partner with us.

Over the last 18 years, more than 250 museums, historic sites, and organizations across eastern Kansas and western Missouri have voluntarily partnered with us. Together, they help fulfill our mandate to spur tourism and economic development by raising awareness of the exceptional, foundational stories that define this region and everyone who calls it home: the settlement of the frontier, the Border and Civil War, and the enduring struggle for freedom.

Those core themes of triumph and struggle reveal the 41 counties that form Freedom’s Frontier to be singular, vital components of the American saga. Our mission is to help tell their stories, simultaneously preserving our past and fostering our future.

2024 Grants Report

In fiscal year 2024, Freedom's Frontier awarded 20 Project Grants totaling nearly **\$30,000** to communities throughout our 41 counties in Kansas and Missouri.

Using FFNHA grant funds, the **Riley County Genealogical Society** created five historical markers about the founding of Manhattan, Kansas to be placed on their recreational Linear Trail. They collaborated with multiple groups to research the content and added five pull-up banners for indoor use. The first location to host them reported 7,522 visitors in three weeks.

After devastating water damage required a full rebuild of their Archaeology and Native American Wing, **St. Joseph Museums, Inc.** used funding from Freedom's Frontier and other sources to create updated, interactive exhibit spaces and more fully research their Indigenous artifacts.

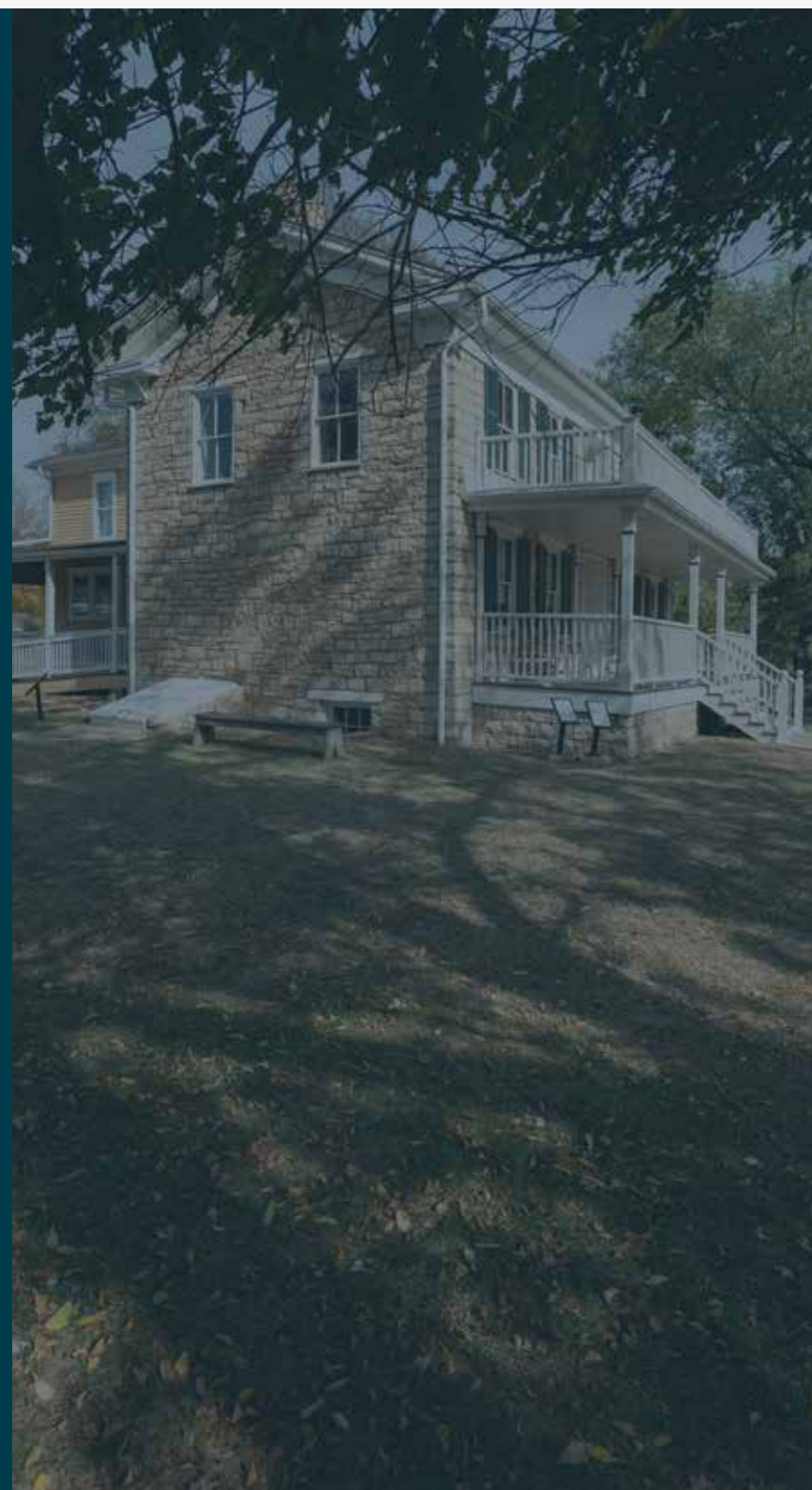
The Southeast Kansas Museum Alliance, which includes 49 museums and historical sites, updated its passport tourism program for summer 2024. The **Osage Mission-Neosho County Historical Society** applied for funding on behalf of the 18 FFNHA partner sites included.

The **Brown v. Board of Education 70th Anniversary Speakers Bureau** featured four topics exploring the enduring struggle for freedom through the lens of educational equality. The presentations asked participants in Freedom's Frontier counties to consider and discuss what social and educational progress our nation has made since the 1954 ruling, and where disparities still exist.

Kansas City Kansas Community College and **Sumner Academy of Arts & Science** collaborated on a project for students to create interpretive panels exploring the schools' history. Four students interviewed alumni and conducted academic research. From this work, a website, audio recordings, and a nine-piece traveling exhibit were created. They also hosted a school assembly that brought together current Sumner Academy students, alumni, and local political leaders to celebrate the school's past, present, and future.

To address a backlog of donated items, **Cass County Historical Society**

(Continued on next page.)



purchased archival boxes and hired an intern to process and catalogue these items. One family's donation filled up 10 of the archival boxes. After the summer internship, a regular volunteer continued the work and has freed up much of their office space.

Cherryvale Historical Society purchased a new computer, printer, storage drives, and software to begin the process of scanning 4000 historically significant photos currently occupying 14 scrapbooks, 3 boxes, and two 20-gallon tubs. They are working with the local library to obtain additional photos and a secure, centralized location to store them after scanning.

The **Douglas County Historical Society** received assistance with the design and fabrication of a new artifact display case for the Bleeding Kansas core exhibit at the Watkins Museum of History. Adding this case facilitated the display of newly acquired Bleeding Kansas and Civil War artifacts belonging to Ephraim Nute, a Civil War chaplain and founder of Lawrence's Unitarian Church, donated by a descendant in early 2024.

Geary County Historical Society embarked on an exterior sign project for their six historic buildings after previous plans had been halted during the 2020 pandemic. Now these sites—the Old Junction City High School, Starcke House, St. Joseph's Historic Church, Spring Valley School, Wetzels Cabin, and Little Cabin—whether open or not, can share their history with visitors.

The **Gordon Parks Museum** updated and significantly enhanced the museum's technology and interactives. The new displays better showcase slide shows of Gordon Parks's photographs, interviews, related films and videos, along with other artist works inspired by his remarkable career to fight against racism, poverty and discrimination.

The **Monticello Community Historical Society** purchased frames and printed 1000 copies of their Township Tour brochure. The new framing materials allowed them to highlight an exhibit on James Butler "Wild Bill" Hickok, drawing new visitors and increasing visibility ahead of America 250 celebrations.

To increase visibility and, therefore, visitors, **Mount Mitchell Prairie Guards** reprinted their park brochure for distribution at all official Kansas Department of Tourism Visitor Centers, in local museums and business, and at the Mount Mitchell Heritage Prairie Park itself.

After Merrill J. Mattes passed, **Oregon-California Trails Association** inherited his copious research notes, trail diaries, maps, and correspondence, forming a Memorial Library in Independence, MO. While interns had already digitized the diaries and created a finding aid for the collection, they were finally able to upload those documents to their website.

The **Shawnee Mission Indian Historical Society** replaced a failing water fountain at their 1840 site, allowing the organization to host field trips for students and other groups for years to come. The Kansas State Historical Society oversaw the installation.

The **Shawnee County Historical Society** purchased an updated display to highlight their extensive collection of videos regarding their sites and programs including the Ritchie House, the oldest house in Topeka.

Union Cemetery cleaned and restored over 200 historic headstones after holding five public classes and training nearly 100 volunteers. The project was highlighted in an NPR segment about engaging young people in historic volunteerism.

Finally, the **Wyandot Nation of Kansas** purchased seven tribal flags and 1000 brochures to share their story, raise awareness, and start conversations with area residents.

2024 FFNHA Awards

The Tacha Freedom Award, named in honor of the founding chair of Freedom's Frontier, the Honorable Deanell Tacha, retired United States circuit judge, this year recognized Addison Reeman. Addison, a senior at Liberty High School, worked alongside non-profit leaders to develop and implement garden plans for five garden beds at Pharis Farm in Liberty, Missouri. The plans included multi-season production of produce, which is donated to those in need. Addison's project is a facet of a larger process to restore the farm to its original setting and purpose, providing real-world learning experiences for her peers.

Named in honor of FFNHA's founding executive director, the Judy Billings Most Valuable Project Award recognizes significant contributions to our mission. We highlighted three projects in 2024—one for each Freedom's Frontier theme.

Shaping the Western Frontier was awarded to the Riley County Genealogical Society, which organized a committee to research and identify ten historical events that contributed to the development of Manhattan, Kansas. Five markers were created to be installed by the City of Manhattan Parks and Recreation. Additionally, an educational campaign contributed interviews and other web-based resources.

The Missouri-Kansas Border War was awarded to the Wornall/Majors House Museums for their signage recognizing voices of enslaved labor on the property and communicating the site's role in the Battle of Westport as a Confederate Field Hospital on the Missouri side of the Civil War. In their research, they uncovered the identities of some of the enslaved individuals who labored there.

The Enduring Struggle for Freedom was awarded to St. Joseph Museum's renovation of its Harry L. George Native American exhibit. After the display was extensively damaged by a burst water pipe, the organization sought assistance from Freedom's Frontier and Missouri Humanities to help save and eventually reexhibit the artifacts. Their consulted with Native tribes to discuss the collection's legacy and future, ultimately affecting better collaboration between Native peoples, governmental agencies, curio dealers, collectors, and museums.



Education

BUS ON US

Field Trip Grants

FFNHA's Bus on Us transportation grant program entered its ninth year in FY 2024. Awarded to Kansas and Missouri educators and teachers, these grants ensure K-12 students engage with the region's history in hands-on, face-to-face settings.




23
Schools

Districts as far north as **St. Joseph, MO** (Central High School); as far south as **Lebanon, MO** (Lebanon High School); as far west as **Topeka, KS** (Robinson Middle School); as far east as **Warrensburg, MO** (Ridge View Elementary); and the **Kansas City metro** were approved for funding.



29
Buses

Schoolbuses shuttled students to partner sites across Freedom's Frontier, from rural outposts like **Fort Scott National Historic Site** and the **Amelia Earhart Birthplace Museum** to bustling urban destinations like the **Museum of Deaf History, Arts & Culture** in Olathe, Kansas.

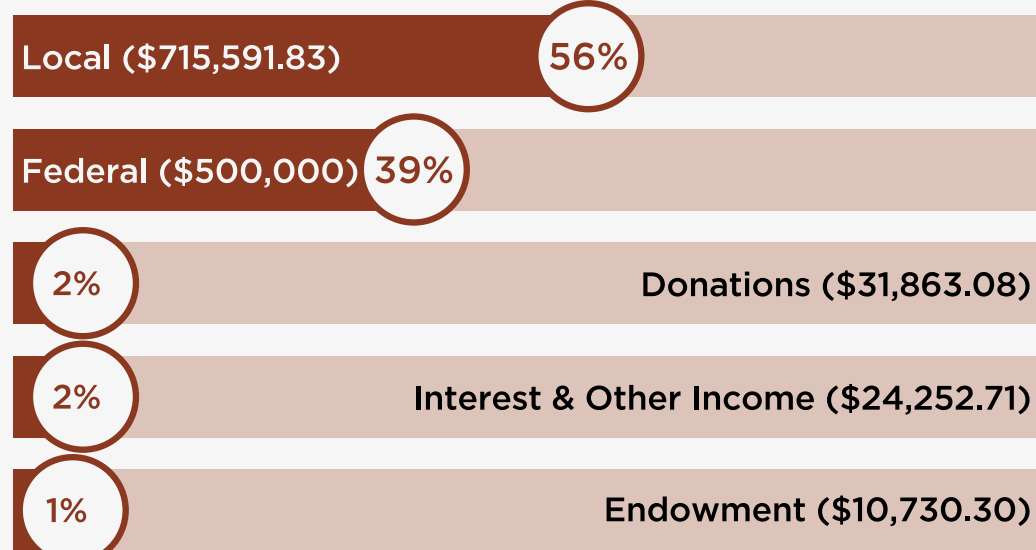


1,468
Students

From **third grade students** to **high school seniors**, schoolchildren from all age groups participated in one-of-a-kind experiences that took them from the classroom to real-life historic locations across Kansas and Missouri for authentic, place-based learning.

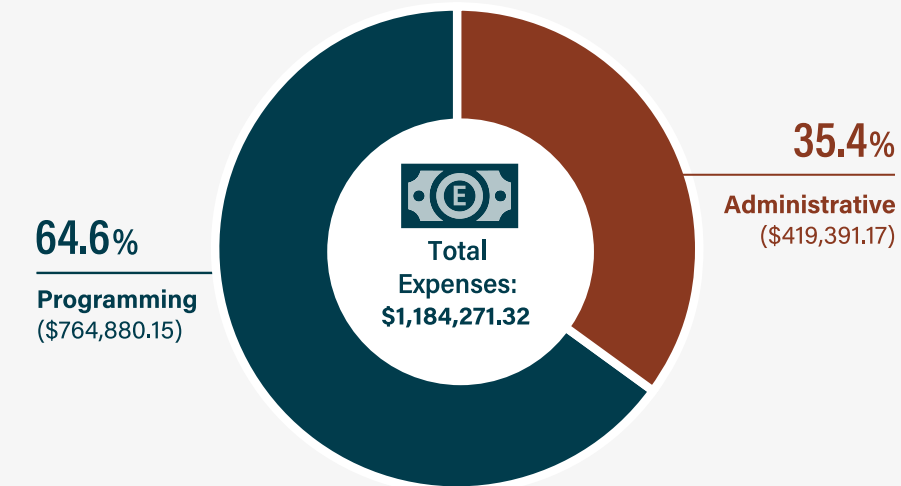
Financials

Income



Total Income: \$1,282,437.92

Expenses



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Candid is the world's largest source of information on nonprofit organizations. Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area was awarded the 2023 Candid Platinum Seal of Transparency, achieved by less than one tenth of 1% of nonprofits.

2024 Partners

1855 Harris-Kearney House Museum and Westport Historical Society
 1859 Jail, Marshal's Home and Museum
 Adrian Area Historical Society
 Agency Ford Museum
 Albrecht-Kemper Museum of Art
 Alexander/Madison Chapter of KC Buffalo Soldiers
 Alexander Majors House and Barn
 Allen County Historical Society
 Amelia Earhart Birthplace Museum
 Amelia Earhart Hanger Museum
 American Flight Museum
 American Jazz Museum
 Anita B. Gorman Conservation Discovery Center
 Appleton City Landmark Restorations, Inc.
 Arabia Steamboat Museum
 Archives & Research Center of Franklin Co KS
 Atchison County Historical Society
 Atkins-Johnson Farm & Museum
 Baker Wetlands and Discovery Center
 Basehor Historical Museum Society
 Bates County Museum & Historical Society
 Battle of Island Mound State Historic Site
 Battle of Lexington State Historic Site
 Battle of Westport
 Baxter Springs Heritage Center and Museum
 Beecher Bible and Rifle Church
 Bingham-Waggoner Estate
 Black American Blueprint Collective
 Black Archives Museum of St. Joseph
 Black Archives of Mid America
 Black Jack Battlefield and Nature Park
 Blue Room and Gem Theatre
 Boston Daniels Park and Corporation
 Brown v. Board of Education National Historical Park

Bruce R. Watkins Cultural Heritage Center
 Burlingame Historical Preservation Society
 Burlingame Schuyler Museum
 Burnt District Monument and Sharps-Hopper Cabin
 Caney Valley Historical Society & Museum
 Carnegie Building
 Cass County Historical Society and Museum
 Cave Spring Park, home of Barnes Enclosure, Cave Spring, and 3 Trails
 Cherryvale Historical Museum
 Civil War Round Table of Kansas City
 Civil War Round Table of Western Missouri
 Clay County Archives & Historical Library
 Clay County Historical Society Museum
 Clay County Historic Sites
 Clearfield School and Historical Society
 Clendening History of Medicine Museum
 Coffey County Historical Society Museum
 Concordia Area Museum and Historical Society
 Confederate Memorial State Historic Site
 Constitution Hall SHS Lecompton
 Constitution Hall Topeka
 Crawford County Historical Museum
 Curtis House Museum
 Democratic Headquarters of Kansas Territory in Lecompton
 DeSoto Historical Society
 Dietrich Cabin
 Dole Institute of Politics
 Dorothy Day Log Cabin at Platte Wildlife Preserve
 Douglas County Chapter of Santa Fe Trail Association and Ivan Boyd Prairie
 Douglas County Heritage Conservation Council
 Douglass School Project
 Edgerton Community Museum
 Ernie Miller Nature Center

Eudora Area Historical Society and Community Museum
 Excelsior Springs Museum and Archives
 First Territorial Capitol State Historic Site
 Fishburn Archives & Special Collections at Park University
 Flint Hills Discovery Center
 Forest Grove Cemetery Project
 Fort Leavenworth National Cemetery
 Fort Osage National Historic Landmark
 Fort Scott National Historic Site
 Franklin County Historical Society
 Friends of the Free State Capitol
 Frontier Army Museum
 Gardner Historical Museum
 Gardner Junction Park
 Garrison School Cultural Center
 Gay and Lesbian Archive of Mid-America
 Geary County Historical Society
 General Jo Shelby Park and Statue
 George Historic Cemetery Association, Inc.
 Glore Psychiatric Museum
 Goodnow House State Historic Site
 Gordon Parks Museum
 Great Overland Station
 Grinter Place State Historic Site
 Guardians of Grover Barn
 Harry S. Truman Birthplace State Historic Site
 Harry S. Truman Farm Home in Grandview
 Harry S. Truman Library and Museum
 Harry S. Truman NHS Home Site - Independence
 Harry S. Truman NHS Visitor Center
 Harvey J. Higgins Historical Society and Higginsville Museum
 Haskell Cultural Center and Museum
 Historical Society of New Santa Fe/Trailside Center

Historic Mt. Gilead Church and School
 Historic Topeka Cemetery
 Howard Cemetery
 Humboldt’s Orcutt Living History Backyard Museum
 Humboldt Historical Society and Museum
 Huron Indian Cemetery
 Independence Historical Museum and Art Center
 Jackson County Historical Society
 Jefferson County Historical and Genealogical Society
 Jesse James Bank Museum
 Jesse James Birthplace Farm and Museum
 Jesse James Home Museum (at Patee House)
 John and Mary Ritchie House
 John Brown Museum SHS and Adair Cabin
 John Brown Speaks
 Johnson County Historical Society
 Johnson County Historic Courthouse Museum
 Johnson County Library
 Johnson County Museum
 Juneteenth, KC
 Kansas City Area Historic Trails Association
 Kansas City Kansas Community College Art Gallery
 Kansas City Museum
 Kansas Historical Society
 Kaw Point Park
 Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art
 King Hill Cemetery and Preservation Corps
 KU Natural History Museum
 LaBudde Special Collections, Miller Nichols Library, UMKC
 La Cygne Historical Society
 Lanesfield School Historic Site
 Lansing Historical Museum
 Lawrence/Douglas County Community

Remembrance Project Coalition
 Lawrence Public Library
 Leavenworth Historical Society and Carroll Mansion Museum
 Lecompton Historical Society And Territorial Capitol Museum
 Lee’s Summit Historical Society, Museum, and Historic Cemetery
 Legler Barn Museum and Depot
 Leila’s Hair Museum
 Lenexa Historical Society
 Leonard H. Axe Library at Pittsburg State University
 Lexington Historical Association and Museum
 Liberty African American Legacy Memorial Project at Garrison School
 Liberty Jail Historic Site
 Lied Center
 Linn County Historical Society and Museum
 Little House on the Prairie Museum
 Lone Jack Historical Society
 Louisburg Historical Society
 Lowell Milken Center for Unsung Heroes
 Mahaffie Stagecoach Stop and Farm
 Marais de Cygnes Society and Massacre State Historic Site
 Marais des Cygnes National Wildlife Refuge
 Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art
 Marla Quilts, and African Quilts Museum, Inc.
 Martha Lafite Thompson Nature Sanctuary
 McClure Archives and University Museum UCM
 Mem-Erie Historical Museum
 Merriam Historic Plaza
 Miami County Historical Museum
 Midland Railway Depot
 Mine Creek Battlefield State Historic Site
 Miners Hall Museum

Missouri River Outfitters Chapter of Sante Fe Trails Association
 Missouri Town
 Missouri Valley Room KCMO Library
 Monticello Community Historical Society
 Mound City Historical Society and Park
 Mount Mitchell Heritage Prairie Park
 Mount Mora Cemetery
 Mt. Vernon Cemetery Association
 Museum at Prairiefire
 Museum of Deaf History, Arts & Culture, Inc (MDHAC)
 Museum of the Kansas National Guard
 National Archives at Kansas City
 National Frontier Trails Museum
 National World War I Museum and Memorial
 Negro Leagues Baseball Museum
 Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art
 Newell-Johnson-Searle House
 Olathe Historical Society
 Olathe Memorial Cemetery
 Olathe Public Library
 Old Castle Museum at Baker University
 Old Depot Museum
 Old Jefferson Town
 Old Prairie Town at Warde-Meade Historic Site
 Old Quindaro Museum
 Old Stone House Along the Oregon Trail Conservancy
 Opothleyahola Memorial Building
 Oregon-California Trails Association
 Osage Mission-Neosho County Historical Society Museum and Graves Library
 Osage Village State Historic Site
 Overland Park Arboretum and Botanical Gardens
 Overland Park Historical Society

Partners of the First Territorial Capitol
 Patee House Museum
 Pharis Farm
 Platte County Historical Society and Ben Ferrel Museum
 Pony Express National Museum
 Poplar Heights Living History Farm and Museum
 Prairie State Park
 Quindaro Overlook and Ruins
 Quindaro Underground Railroad Museum (Historic Vernon School)
 Rapp School
 Ray County Historical Society Museum and Genealogical Library
 Raytown Historical Society And Museum
 Remington Nature Center
 Rice-Tremonti Home
 Richard Allen Cultural Center and Museum
 Riley County Genealogical Society
 Riley County Historical Society and Museum
 Ritchie Cemetery
 Robidoux Row Museum
 Sauk River Camp
 SEK Museum Alliance
 Shawnee County Historical Society
 Shawnee Indian Mission State Historic Site
 Shawnee Mission DAR Chapter
 Shawnee Town 1929 Museum
 Shoal Creek Living History Museum
 Smithville MO Historical Society
 Southeast KS Nature Center at Schermerhorn Park and Cave
 Spencer Museum of Art
 St. Clair County Historical Society and Museum
 St. Joseph Museums

St. Philippine Duchesne Shrine and Potawatomie Trail of Death Memorial Park
 Sumner Elementary School (Brown v Board Sumner Legacy Trust)
 Thomas Hart Benton Home and Studio State Historic Site
 Tonganoxie Community Historical Society
 Topeka Genealogical Society
 Trading Post Museum
 Union Cemetery Historical Society and Cemetery
 Union Station
 Vaile Victorian Mansion
 Vernon County Historical Society and Bushwacker Museum
 Virginia School
 Wabaunsee Cemetery
 Wabaunsee County Historical Society and Museum
 Wakarusa River Valley Heritage Museum
 Wakefield Museum
 Watkins Museum of History and Douglas County Historical Society
 Watkins Woolen Mill State Historic Site
 Weaving the River
 Wells P. Bailey House & Historic Preservation Partnership of Lyndon, Inc.
 Wentworth Military Academy Museum
 Weston Historical Museum
 William Clarke Quantrill Society
 Wilson County Historical Society and Museum
 Wonder Workshop Children’s Museum
 Woodson County Historical Society and Museum
 Wornall Majors House Museums
 Wyandot Nation of Kansas
 Wyandotte County Historical Museum
 Wyandotte High School Alumni Center
 Wyeth-Tootle Mansion

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200 West 9th Street
Lawrence, KS 66044
freedomfrontier.org