

## Freedom's Frontier

# FISCAL YEAR 2024 ANNUAL REPORT



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 nineteenth 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

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

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

Library & Muse

## 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 indominable 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 Country 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.

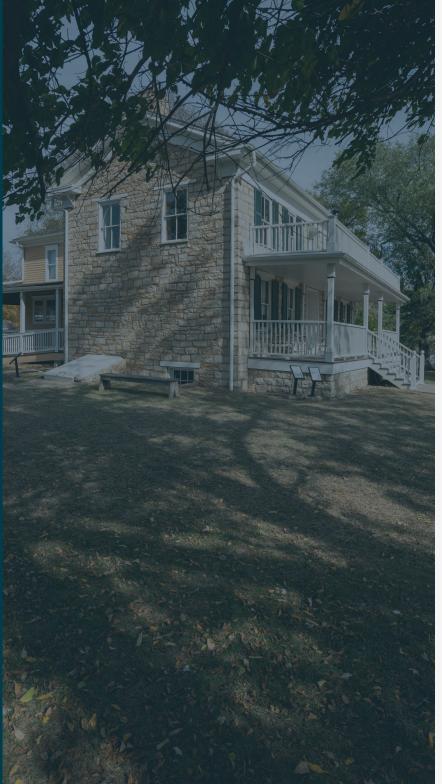
The Southeast Kansas Museum Alliance, which includes 49 museums and historical sites, updated its passport tourism program for summer 2024. The **Osage Mission-Neosho County Historical Society** applied for funding on behalf of the 18 FFNHA partner sites included.

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, Wetzel 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.



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.

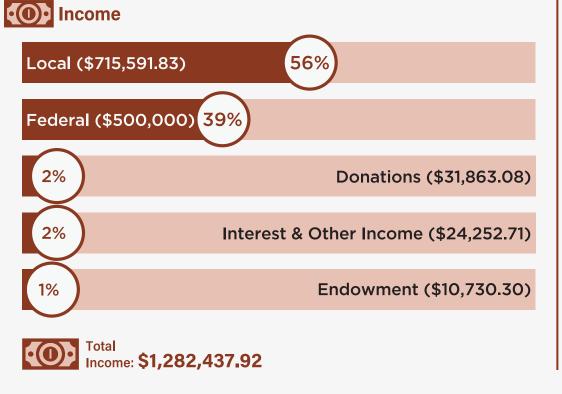


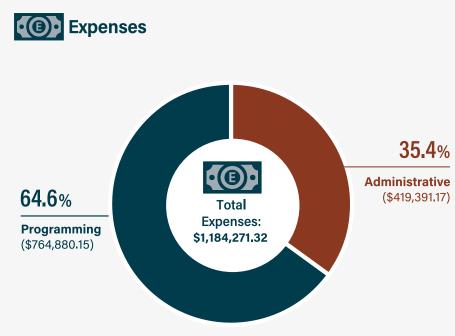
Schoolbuses shuttled students to partner sites across Freedom's Frontier, from rural outposts like Fort Scott National Historic Site and the Amelia Earhart Birthplace Museum to bustling urban destinations like the Museum of Deaf History, Arts & Culture in Olathe, Kansas.



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





#### Platinum Transparency 2023 Candid.

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.

### Board of Trustees

#### **Honorary Co-Chairs**

Mike Parson, Missouri Governor Laura Kelly, Kansas Governor

#### **Executive Committee**

Gary Nevius, Chair — Overland Park, Kansas
The Hon. Karen Arnold-Burger, Vice Chair — Topeka, Kansas
John McGee, Treasurer — Prairie Village, Kansas
Steve Hitchcock, Secretary — Baldwin City, Kansas

#### **Trustee Roster**

The Hon. Duane Benton — Kansas City, Missouri Clay Bauske — Weston, Missouri Marsha Corbin — Dover, Missouri Marilyn Davis — Humboldt, Kansas Kent Glasscock — Olathe, Kansas Ray Hill — Kansas City, Missouri

#### **Partner Representative**

Jennifer Reed — Harrisonville, Missouri

#### **Ex-Officio Members**

Gary Kremer, Missouri State Historical Society Patrick Zollner, Kansas State Historical Society

Kevin Wood, Immediate Past Chair — Lee's Summit, Missouri Mary Ice — Manhattan, Kansas

Mike Delaney — Lawrence, Kansas

Caronda Moore — Manhattan, Kansas Martin Owens — Lee's Summit, Missouri Luther Smith — Kansas City, Kansas Bill Tempel — Leawood, Kansas Bob Totten — Topeka, Kansas

Kristen Zane — Overland Park, Kansas

10

## 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 Clav 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 Gav 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

13

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

Historic Mt. Gilead Church and School

Historic Topeka Cemetery

Remembrance Project Coalition Lawrence Public Library Leavenworth Historical Society and Carroll Mansion 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 (MDHAC) 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 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 Ouindaro 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 Ouindaro 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

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

St. Philippine Duchesne Shrine and Potawatomie

Executive Director
Holly Zane

Staff

Lucinda Adams

Associate Director

Johnny Szlauderbach Director of Communications & Projects

> Kate Sutter Director of Programming

Bethany Prothro Programming Coordinator

15



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