

Collections Research News

Spring 2000

COLLECTIONS KORNER

(Collections Korner is a regular feature of *Collections Research News*. If there is any topic you would like to see covered in the future, give us a call or drop us a line.)

Double Your Exhibit Space -- Without Building

Guest article by Kim Sorvig

More space! It's a constant cry from museum administrators. Yet there is one huge space that many museums, large and small, waste by overlooking its exhibit potential. That space is the museum landscape.

A museum's site is frequently two to ten times the square footage of the building. But what does the landscape do for your museum's mission? In all too many cases, nothing: a non-descript lawn, some beautiful bushes or trees, maybe a picnic area, but nothing that helps the visitor enjoy and understand the historic or cultural treasures that are a museum's real purpose.

The museum landscape can -- and should -- be an integral part of the visitor's experience. As a museum professional, you've probably visited or read about such landscapes: interpretive trails, sculpture gardens, or "living history" exhibits, for example. These "interpretive landscapes" are not uncommon, but opportunities are frequently overlooked, both by museum staff and by architects. Relatively few designers can coordinate topography, vegetation, climate, existing buildings, and land-use history to tell your museum's individual story.

Creative landscape design opens up space and possibilities for museums, usually at a fraction of the cost of building expansion. The visitor can be guided on a storyteller's journey through

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WHAT'S NEW AT CRM

In January, 2000 our principle was in Ft. Worth, TX for one week to conduct an inventory of the collection at the Cattle Raiser's Museum and train their personnel in basic inventory procedures. It was an intense week, but very productive.

We have also been working on a "Web" presentation for gallery access to the Photographic Collection of the Buffalo Bill Museum and Grave in Golden, CO. This is a whole new technology for us, but utilizes the built-in web publishing capabilities of FileMaker® Pro and will allow the museum's visitors to access the Photograph Collection databases in the museum's gallery space.

FILEMAKER® PRO CATALOGING

TEMPLATES NOW AVAILABLE FROM CRM

Collections Research for Museums has created a collection database using the commercial software FileMaker® Pro. Cataloging templates are available for object collections, photographic collections and archival collections. We will also customize a cataloging screen for those of you who have specialized collections. We can also connect your database to an imaging system to allow photographs of the collection to be incorporated into the database. Contact us for details and pricing.

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dimensions that can't be
contained indoors:

Carefully chosen
plantings can exhibit
medicinal, agricultural,
or ritual concepts for a
cultural museum.

For an art museum,
plantings might fit the
era when the art was
created, or suggest how
specific natural scenes
inspired a "school," or
even exhibit sources of
artists' materials like
turpentine, linen, or
madder pigment.

Likewise, topography can
evoke powerful
experience. A visitor,
moving slowly uphill and
suddenly discovering a
clearing or vista, might
identify with historic
individuals or cultures
who explored and lived
on the land.

Beyond this literal kind
of evocation, metaphors
can also be conveyed by
the landscape: that same
hill and clearing might
suggest the uphill
course of an artist's
career, or a diplomat's,
or a frontierswoman's -
moving from early
struggles to the clear
perspective of mature
skill.

Especially when combined
with relevant outdoor
artifacts (or reproductions/
representations),
interpretive landscapes can
dramatically increase the
depth of the visitor's
enjoyment.

The beauty of interpretive
landscapes is that they are
site-specific. There is
usually a good reason (or at
least an interesting one)

why the museum ended up on a
particular site. Often,
that story adds richness and
context to the collection,
linking it to present-day
users through the history of
the site. Good interpretive
site design can help make
your museum stand out as
unique or unusual. A well-
designed museum landscape
can show off artifacts too
big for indoor display
(vehicles, for example).
Outdoor activities can turn
a small museum from a one-
hour visit to an all-day
attraction, especially if
the landscape is designed to
help staff put on festivals
and activities that can't
happen indoors among the
display cases.

So when exhibit space versus
budget seems to be backing
you into a corner, escape to
the outdoors. Interpretive
landscapes can take you and
your visitors someplace new
-- right in your own
backyard.

Kim Sorvig is principal of
Interpretive Landscape
Design, Santa Fe, NM, and a
nationally known author on
landscape design and
construction. His seminars,
especially *Meaning & Place*,
have been presented by
invitation as far afield as
Christchurch, New Zealand;
Guadalajara, Mexico; and
Washington DC. He is the
author of Sustainable
Landscape Construction: A
Guide to Green Building
Outdoors (Island Press,
2000) and To Heal Kent State
(Worldview, 1990) on the
design of a controversial
interpretive memorial. He
can be reached at 505-474-
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SERVICES

Collections Research for
Museums can now **assist small
museums with computerizing
their collection documen-
tation** using off-the-shelf
database software. Our
current specialty is
FileMaker® Pro databases
(see article on Pg 1). For
more information, give us a
call at (303) 757-7962.

In addition, Collections
Research for Museums is
still offering **classes for
small museums in Cataloging
and Collections Management**.
If you would like more
information on topics
covered and costs, give us a
call at (303) 757-7962 or
drop us a line.

We are also still offering a
variety of **other services** to
museums, large and small.
These **range from simple
inventories to complete and
thorough cataloging of
collections**. Feel free to
contact us for more
information. We still
provide a **free initial
consultation**.

Also, if you need help
preparing your NAGPRA
summaries or inventories, we
can help. Give us a call.

(Collections Research News is
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Questions, comments or story
suggestions are always welcome.)