The ABCs & 123s
of Creating Innovative Local History Exhibits

Bonnie Byrd, Waukesha County Historical Society & Museum

Jarrod Roll, Monroe County Local History Room & Museum

Hannah Scholze, Monroe County Local History Room & Museum

Who we are

- Bonnie Byrd

- Hannah Scholze

- Jarrod Roll

Session Goals

- ❑ Exhibit Development Process
- ❑ Building Low-Tech Interactives
- ❑ Creative Design Elements
- ❑ Fundraising for an Exhibit
- ❑ Benefits & Challenges

Our ABCs & 123s

History of Waukesha in 100 OBJECTS

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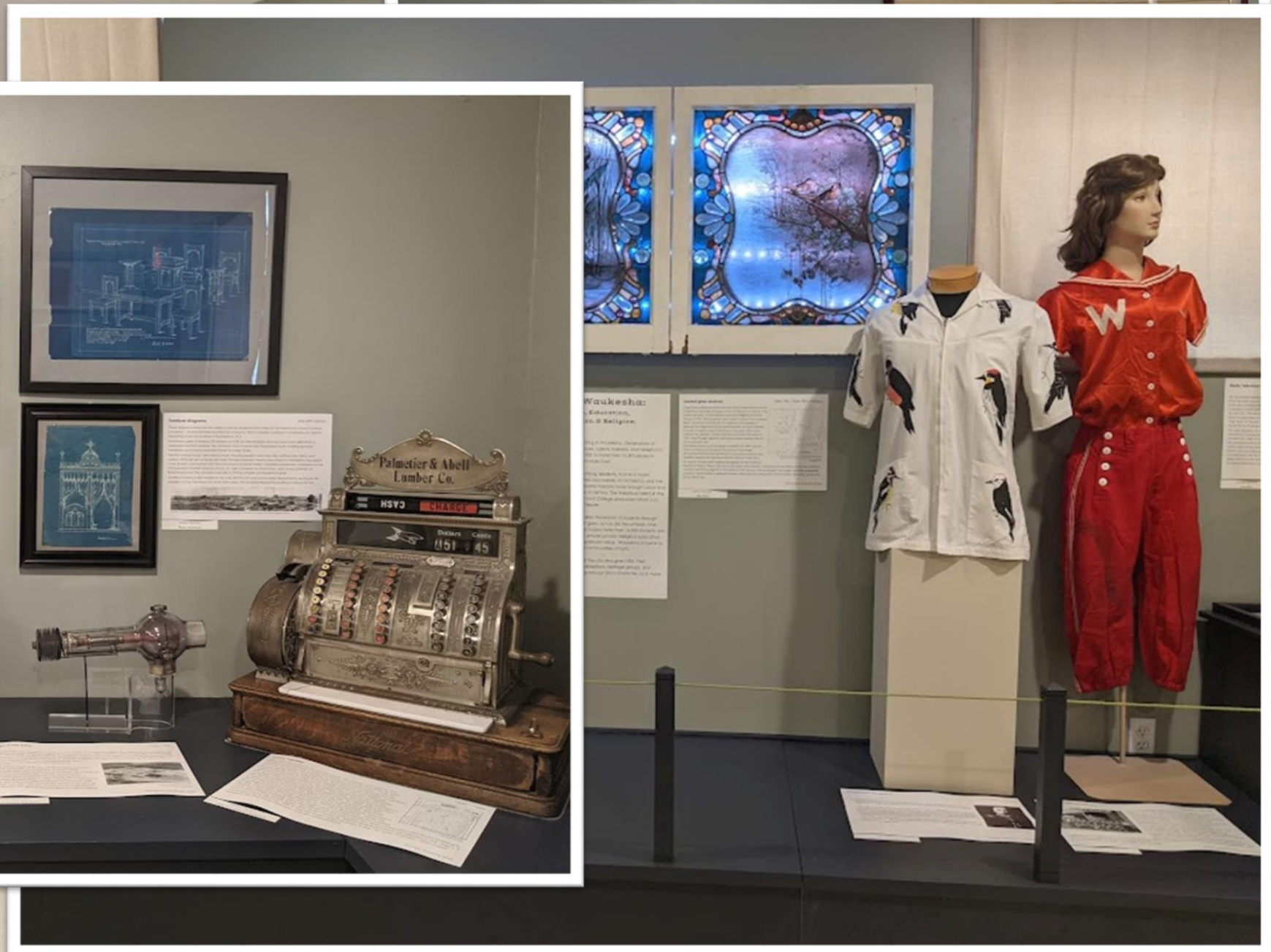
WISCONSIN HUMANITIES

Dan & Cheryl Boehmke
Sunset Dental

City of Waukesha
Looking Back - Reaching Forward

Palmetier & Abell
Lumber Co.
CASH
CHARGE



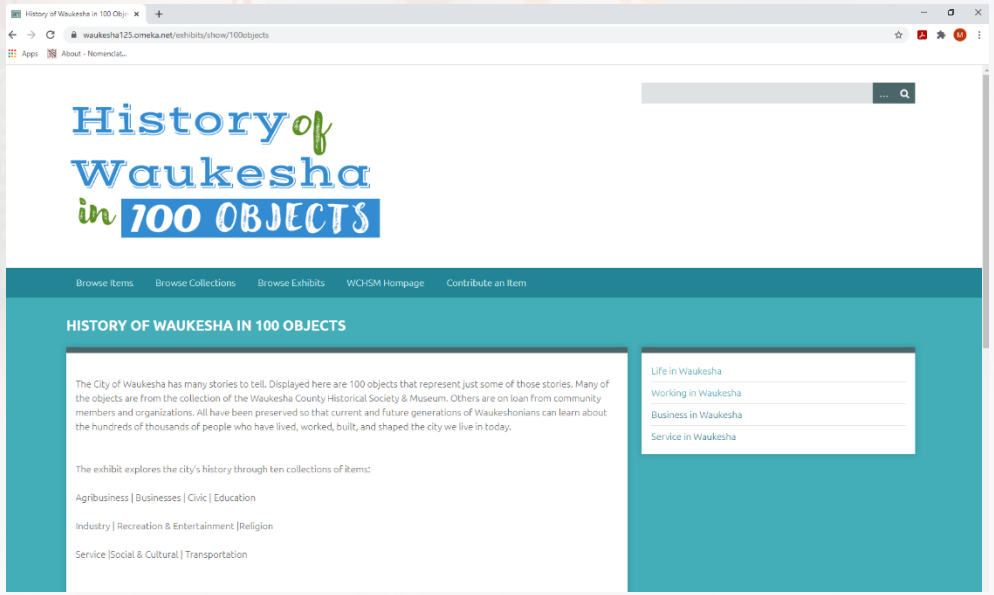
What was there previously?

Why build a new exhibit?

A. Anniversary | Commemoration

B. Increase Capacity & Engagement

1. Volunteer & Staff
2. Sponsors & Donors
3. Patron Access: Omeka



Continued….

C. **Expand Representation**

Goal of each object:

1. Related to the City of Waukesha
2. Contribute a new idea, concept, or perspective
3. Add to the timeline 1896-2021

Development: How it came together

1. Inspiration
2. Collaboration
3. Funding

History of Waukesha in 100 OBJECTS

WAUKESHA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM

The Waukesha County Historical Society & Museum is pleased to join other businesses and community organizations in celebrating the City of Waukesha's 125th Anniversary in 2021. A cornerstone feature of the year-long celebration will be the special WCHSM exhibition: *History of Waukesha in 100 Objects.*

The exhibit showcases the history of the City of Waukesha through artifact and archival objects, each selected to represent a piece of the city's history. Particular focus is on the 125 years since the city incorporated in 1896.

The exhibit will open in March 2021, spanning the four rooms of the south galleries in the museum at 101 W Main Street in downtown Waukesha. Accompanying the gallery experience will be an exhibit website featuring each of the 100 objects with additional program and interactive elements for students and patrons to access anytime, anywhere.

Sponsorship Opportunities

Presenting Sponsor - $2,500
Private tour of the exhibition OR virtual curator chat (scheduled 2 weeks in advance), and twenty (20) guest passes to the exhibition. Business logo and name will be included on WCHSM's website & the exhibit website. Name acknowledgement in press release and print media. Business logo or name recognition at top of sponsor board in exhibit, and name acknowledgment on five objects labels.

Lead Sponsors - $1,000
Receive twelve (12) guest passes to WCHSM for the exhibition. Business name will be included on WCHSM's website & the exhibit website, press release, and print media. Logo recognition on sponsor board in exhibit, and name acknowledgment on two objects labels.

Supporting Sponsors $500
Receive six (6) guest passes to WCHSM for the exhibition. Business name will be included on WCHSM's main website & exhibit website, press release, and print media. Name recognition on sponsor board in exhibit, and name acknowledgment on one object label.

Adopt-an-Artifact $100
Name recognition on the exhibit and website object label.

125 City of Waukesha

Benefits & Challenges

A. **Donor & Member Engagement**

B. **Increased Confidence**

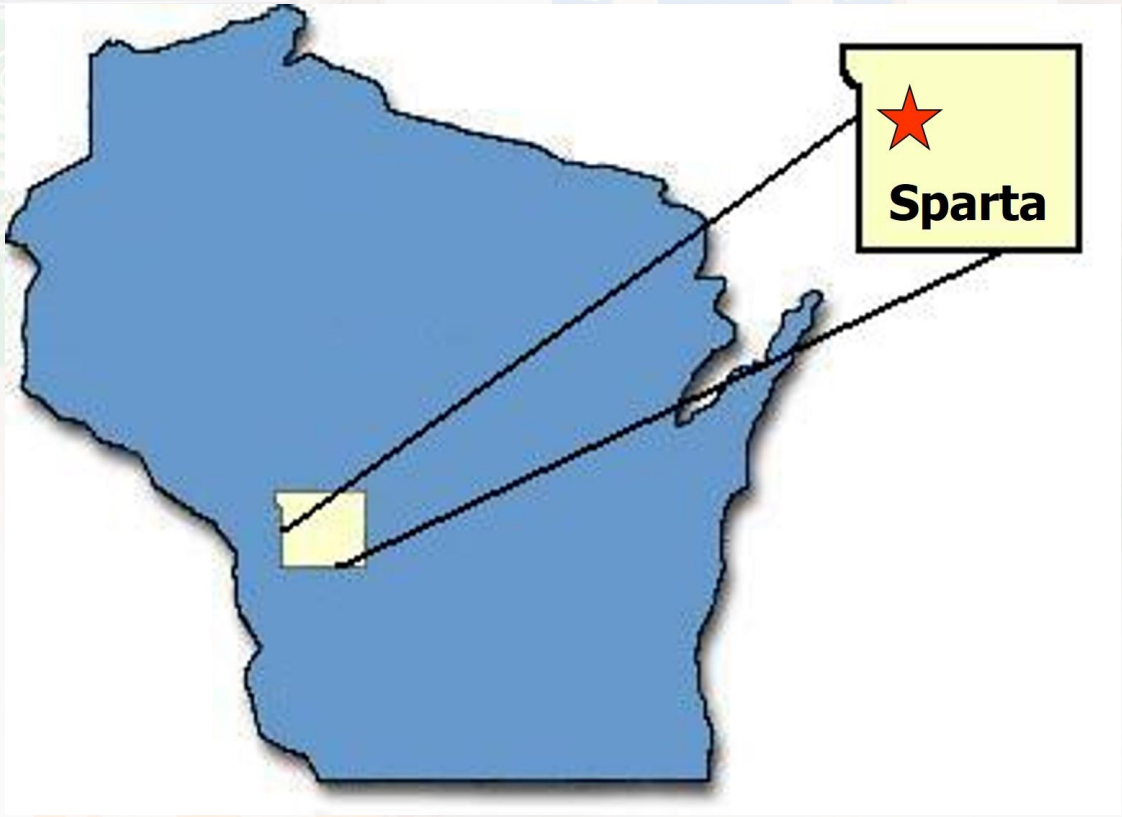
C. **Improved Relationships**

1. **Editing Object Lists**

2. **Schedule**

3. **Representation**
   "Why didn't you include…"

MONROE COUNTY



Monroe County Local History Room and Museum

200 West Main St.

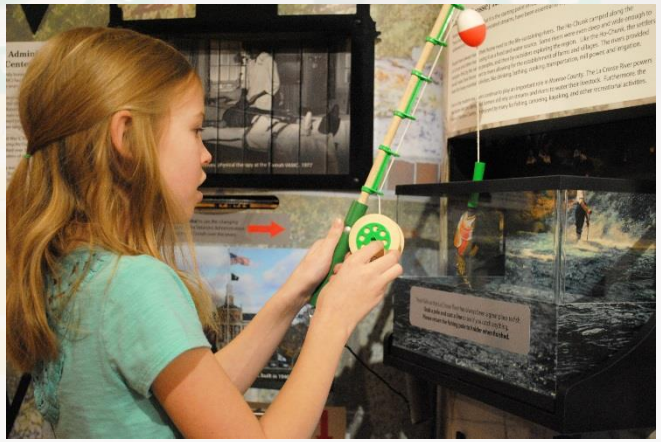
Sparta, Wisconsin

Display Rack 1
Display Rack 2
Explore!
oloring Vintage
-D Photography

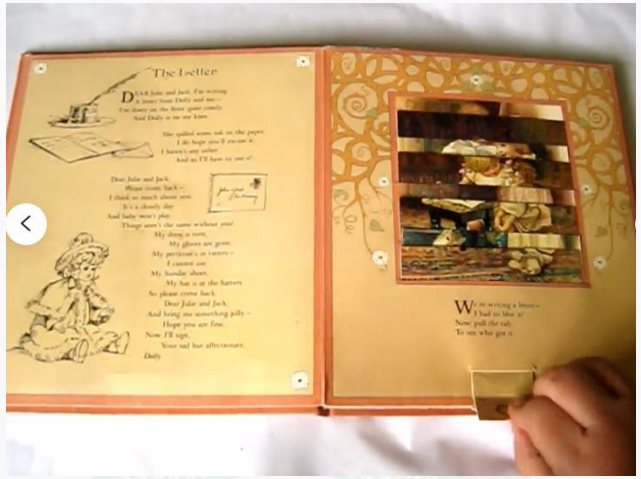
MONROE COUNTY
A TO Z
A
Astronaut
B
Bike Trail
C
Cranberries
D
Dairy
OUT WEST

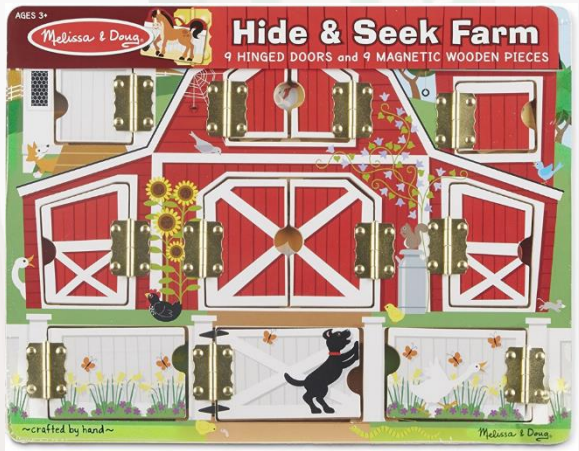
Core Exhibit Goals

- Interactive (multi-sensory)
- Kid-friendly
- Durable
- Analog
- County-wide representation
- Inclusive
- Compact
- Movable



Inspiration…





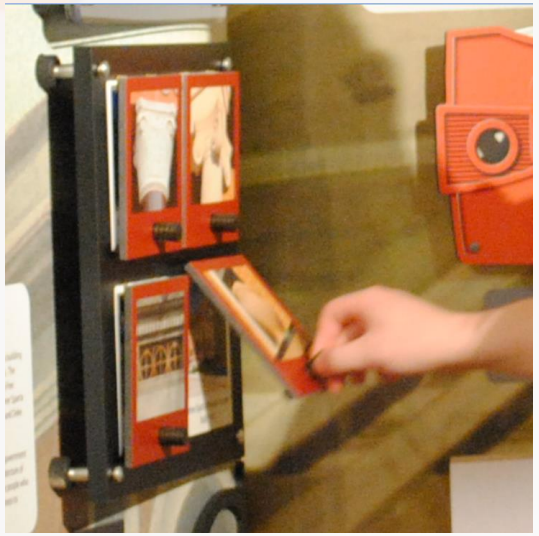
Process of Creation

- Assigning letters
- Dream up/mock up interactive ideas (variety; interactives which reinforce interpretative ideas)
- Meet with designers to determine feasibility and cost
- Determine photos and artifacts to include (obtaining them when necessary)
- Fundraise
- Research; write label copy: EDIT!

Process of Creation Continued

- Create the space where it would go (dismantle old exhibit; return artifacts on display)
- Promote
- Install (problem solving; adding lighting)
- Observe audience use and interaction; make modifications (eg. directions, arrows)

Examples of Interactives



Benefits of Creating the Core Exhibit

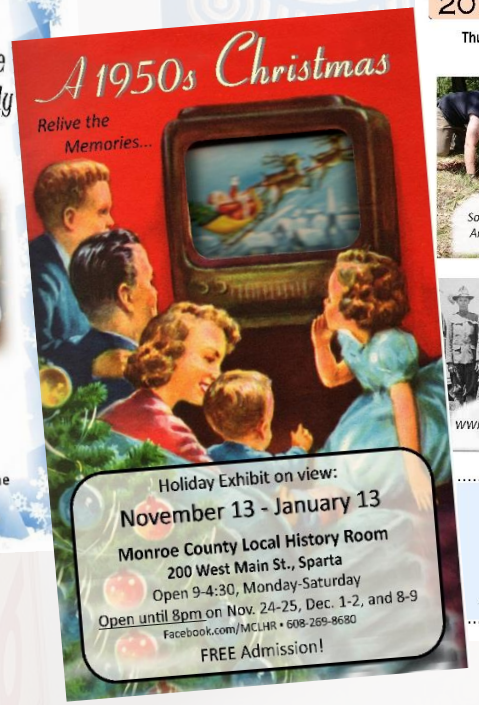
- Strengthening and establishing ties with key stakeholders, businesses, organizations, clubs, artists, and county through their contributions of money, talents, or information.
  - Western Wisconsin Model Railroad Club
  - Veterans Administration Medical Center
  - Civic Group (Kiwanis, Rotary, Lions, etc.)
  - Monroe County Departments & County Board
  - Deke Slayton Memorial Space & Bicycle Museum
  - Cranberry Companies
  - Local Artists
  - Ho-Chunk Nation
  - Fort McCoy
  - Kohler Foundation

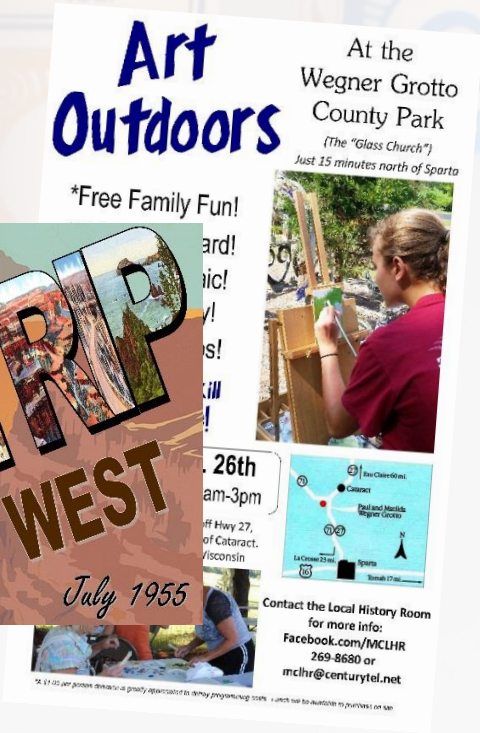
Benefits Continued

- History is more effectively communicated and interpreted
- Overall visitor experience is improved; provides more memorable visit to museum (and community)
- Public views us more as a professional museum
- Public views us a more family-friendly destination
- More repeat visitors
- Exhibit has long shelf life

Challenges of Creating the Core Exhibit

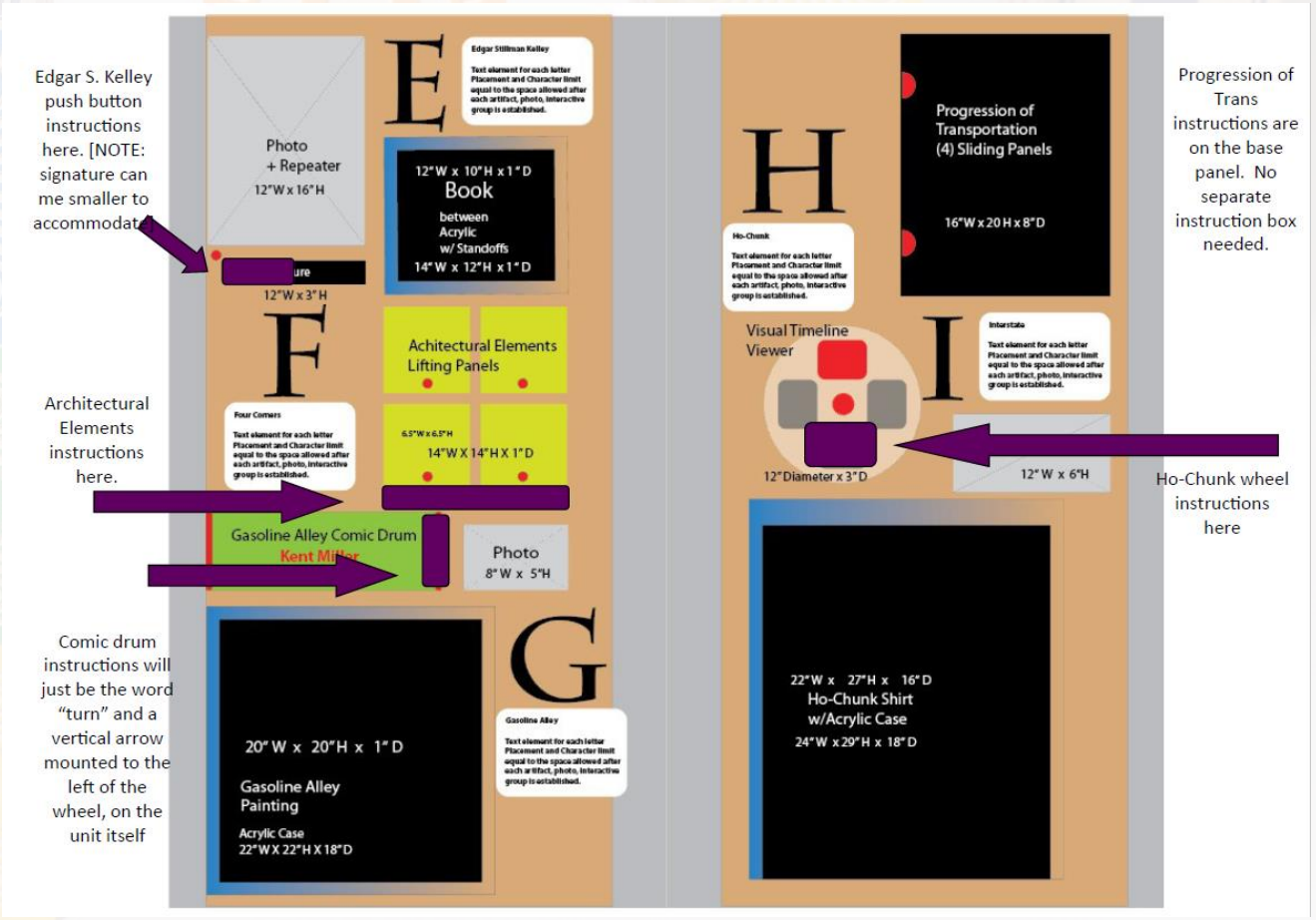
- Developing this exhibit was in addition to normal operations; this severely taxed employees





Challenges Continued

- A lot to coordinate (multiple people, deadlines, logistics)
- Limited space: more ideas, more text than space allowed
- Technical elements didn't always work as designed (disappointment, adaptation)
- Unexpected delays, tight deadlines



Challenges Continued

- Once installed, elements break and need repair (which can take time and money)
- Visitors don't use interactives as intended (don't understand, don't read)
- Interactives can distract from educational content
- School groups (too rough, sensory overload)

Challenges Continued

- Hands-on exhibits during a pandemic

Final Thoughts

- Sometimes you reap benefits beyond the obvious/planned outcomes
- Think big, think creatively!
- Visit museums and other attractions to find inspiration which you can adapt to your venue
- Networking
- Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery

Questions?

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